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The Roads to Serfdom

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CITY JOURNAL

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In Prospect

Conservatives have watched the frequent failure of inner-city blacks with growing sorrow. There is no external reason for it: society is open, racism no longer presents a systemic barrier, the economy is churning out opportunity. The real cause is what radical poet William Blake called "mind-forg'd manacles"—the false beliefs, distorted perceptions, and wrong values that impel people to defeat themselves or to give up without even trying. By anybody's definition, this is tragedy.

How do mind-forg'd manacles come into being? Kay S. Hymowitz's "What's Holding Black Kids Back?" (page 14) gives one answer, and a profound one. Even before bad urban schools do their damage, bad parenting inflicts deeper harm. Hymowitz doesn't speak of the cruelty and neglect that fill the tabloids. She focuses instead on the failings of loving parents, who mean to do right but whose repertoire of child-rearing skills is, through no fault of their own, impoverished, so that they don't give their infants and toddlers the kind of cognitive nurture that middle-class families of all races make it their life's mission to provide. And such cultural patterns, especially those concerning the rearing of infants and toddlers, are extremely hard to change, as Stanley Kurtz observes in his provocative "Can We Make Boys and Girls Alike?" (page 40).

Hard, but not impossible; and as Heather Mac Donald points out in her bracing "Heralds of a Brighter Black Future" on page 24, legions of clear-sighted black conservatives across the nation are working on doing just that. Deploring the victimhood-mongering orthodoxy of today's self-appointed black "leaders," these sturdy individuals preach—and embody—the virtues of personal responsibility, self-help, hard work, respect for the law, and devotion to family. They love America, see its bountiful opportunity, and proudly define themselves as American, without any hyphen. Part of what makes the inner-city parents of Kay Hymowitz's story fail is that their worldview really contains no vision of opportunity, of possibility, and of membership in a larger community, so they can't communicate to their kids the urgency of taking advantage of all that. As these conservatives spread their message, though, they will expand the horizons, and the aspirations, of blacks throughout the country, who in turn will increasingly impart that hopeful vision to their children.

Certainly President Bush is helping out in this effort, as "Compassionate Conservative or Cowboy Capitalist?" on page 36 makes clear. The compassionate conservativism of his first term decisively broke with the Left's four-decade-old anti-poverty victimology; the domestic policy emphasis of his second term is precisely to stress America's plethora of opportunity for all and to expand the free economy that generates it. Instead of emphasizing the problems and pathologies of the inner cities, as War on Poverty theorists did for so long and doubtless with the result of demoralizing blacks further, Bush aims to help everyone perceive, and embrace, America's promise. And he wants to avoid an opportunity-crushing European-style welfare state. That's why his current budget seeks to slash some of the most egregious War on Poverty programs, such as the community-development block grant, which, as Steven Malanga conclusively demonstrates in "America's Worst Urban Program" (page 48), never had a chance of producing the desired effects and degenerated instead into a piggy bank for wasteful and often corrupt patronage.

The worst consequences of the European-style welfare state, as Theodore Dalrymple argues in "The Roads to Serfdom" (page 108), are spiritual. Even when an economy is more or less free, turning over so much responsibility to the state for providing unemployment benefits, health care, education, housing, pensions, and so on, weakens in citizens that self-reliant independence and entrepreneurialism on which Americans have long prided themselves. It makes citizens passive, unproductive, and servile. It robs them of a sense of purpose, so they would not be quick to seize opportunity, even if the welfare state, with its job-killing taxes and regulations, could create more of it. It is, in other words, another factory of the mind-forg'd manacles that destroy so many lives—that create serfs even without a tyrant.

Soundings

Walter B. Wriston

1919–2005

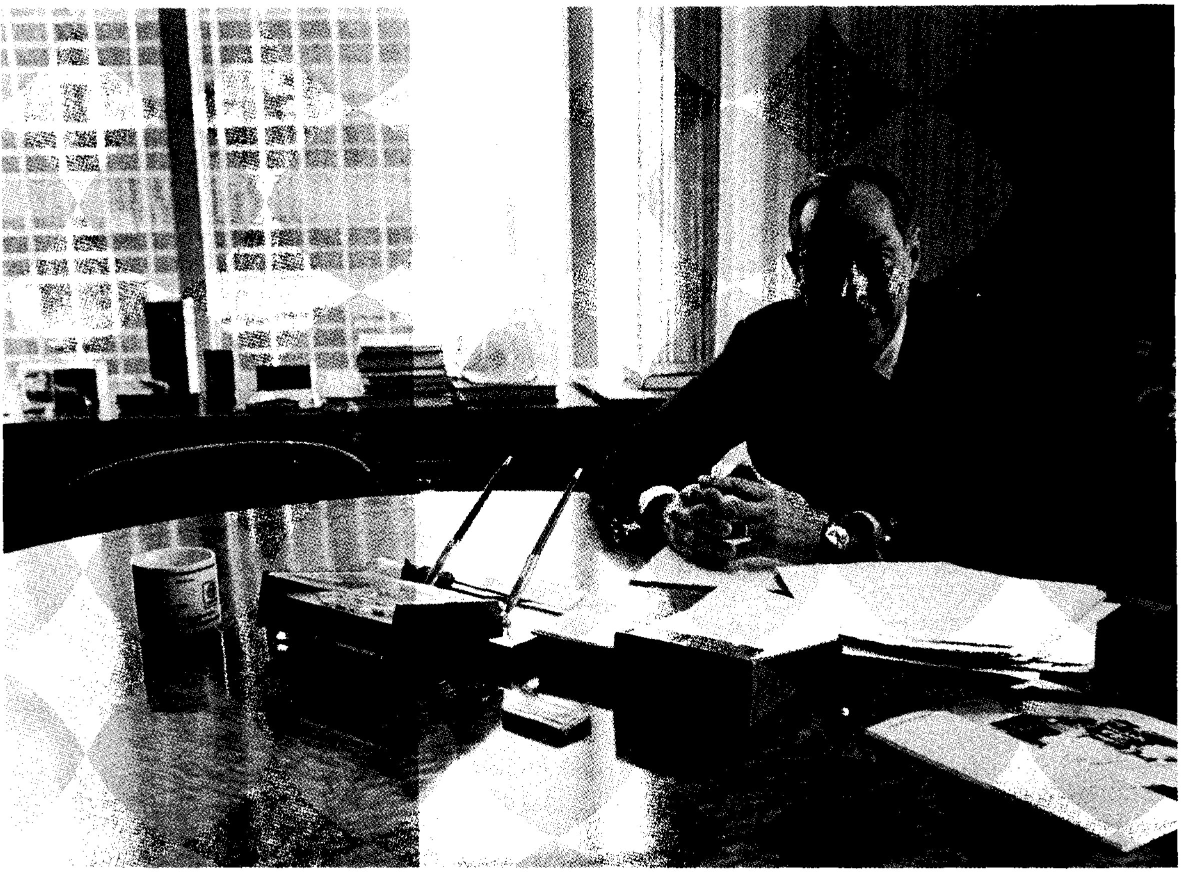
When Walter B. Wriston died in January, New York lost its greatest banker since Alexander Hamilton and its foremost civic leader. His accomplishments sprang from a rock-solid faith in the power of freedom. From the time he first saw an encryption machine as a World War II signal-corps lieutenant, Wriston grasped the liberating potential of information technology; and as chief executive of Citibank for 17 years, he understood that his billion-dollar bet on computerization—including the world's first galaxy of ATM machines—was part of a development that would allow capital and information to flow almost instantaneously around the globe, diluting the power of governments to control the economic and political lives of citizens. Information technology enables capital to move freely to wherever it is wanted and treated well, Wriston liked to say; and that mobility creates a "plebiscite on policy," constraining governments from excessive interference with free markets and the rule of law at the risk of frightening capital away.

Free markets don't by themselves create free people, Wriston understood, but you can't have a free citizenry without them; and the same information revolution that has worked to liberate markets also fosters political liberty, because enslaved peoples now know that the rest of the world lives differently, and thuggish leaders can't oppress their citizens or neighbors without the rest of the world's noticing, disapproving, and withdrawing investment. The communists, with their characteristic note of coarseness and violence, liked to jeer that the capitalists would sell you the rope to hang them with; Wriston knew that what the capitalists are really selling are the instruments to break free of totalitarian chains.

After building Citi into the first truly global bank and transforming the nature of his entire industry with innovation after innovation, Wriston hoped to extend free markets to that bastion of statist central planning that was his adopted city, New York. From the time that he, together with Governor Hugh Carey and investment banker Felix Rohatyn, heroically saved Gotham at the eleventh hour from bankruptcy in the mid-1970s, setting up the Financial Control Board and the Municipal Assistance Corporation and persuading the city's banks and union pension funds to buy its bonds, Wriston labored to make pols and his fellow movers and shakers understand that the city's vast tax-and-spend government was driving its wealth-creating corporations out of town, so that the 140-odd Fortune 500 headquarters that enriched New York at mid-century have dwindled to 30 today. And the same mobility of capital and information technology that worked to create freedom throughout the world, Wriston knew, was allowing this flight of companies and jobs to occur. With computer and communications networks, corporations no longer needed to be physically near their customers, suppliers, and financiers to function.

The Manhattan Institute, *City Journal*'s publisher, became Wriston's primary instrument for ensuring that Gotham would be the capital of the twenty-first century as it had been the capital of the twentieth. He joined our board of trustees in 1986, two years after retiring as CEO of Citicorp, and he was a tireless and generous supporter and booster. Equally important, with what his close friend George P. Schultz calls his "easy brilliance," he was an inexhaustible source of ideas, his naturally quick and curious mind given an especially inquisitive bent from his childhood, when his father was a pathbreaking president of Brown University, and then enriched with a store of practical experience and wisdom from life at the very center of global finance. That easy brilliance shone in his books *Risk and Other Four-Letter Words*, a 1986 collection of essays, and *The Twilight of Sovereignty: How the Information Revolution Is Transforming Our World*, published in 1992.

Imposingly tall, patrician and reserved in his banker's pinstripes, Wriston always set forth his very decided views with disarming modesty and pithy, epigrammatic concision and wit, although from time to time the flash of steel at the center of his convictions shone through. He was an intellectual and moral touchstone, of matchless integrity, selflessly public-spirited and civic-minded in a way that is harder and harder to find. He



AP/WIDE WORLD PHOTOS

was, in the words of his friend and neighbor Henry Kissinger, "the type of American who has made this country the hope of the world."

The Manhattan Institute is proud that its prestigious annual lecture bears his name, and President Bush rightly recognized his matchless worth in awarding him the Presidential Medal of Freedom last year—all the more appropriately, in that freedom was Wriston's creed.

With a friendly and worldly irony that a postmodernist youth could only envy, Wriston liked to greet you with the closing he remembered from the days when he corresponded with French bankers: "Be assured, my dear Sir, of my sentiments the most elevated and my respects the most profound." Same to you, dear Walt—and our affection the most undying.

—Myron Magnet

Florida Daze

The trendy economist extends his creative-class humbug to the world economy.

Economics professor Richard Florida has won a cult following for his theory—developed at length in his hit book *The Rise of the Creative Class*—that hip cities, boasting bohemian enclaves, gay culture, ethnically and racially diverse populations, and funky music, are becoming economic powerhouses because they attract the "creative class" of scientists, techno-geeks, and entrepreneurs that turbocharges the modern economy. Florida advises public officials to toss out outmoded ideas about economic development that focus on things like low taxes, and instead to turn their cities into edgy centers of cool culture and tolerance.

Soundings

Unfortunately for Florida, the theory is completely false. A closer look by *City Journal* revealed that many of Florida's most "creative" cities have in fact been losing jobs and struggling to hold on to people for decades; they're hardly incubators of fast-growing firms (see "The Curse of the Creative Class," Spring 2004). Now Florida is back with a new book that extends his specious argument to the global economy. Like its predecessor, *The Flight of the Creative Class* is a compendium of dubious inferences, staggering leaps of logic, and false assertions.

Early on in the new book, Florida tries to answer the critics of his first tome. He cites the work of a colleague that proves—or so Florida claims—that the creative-class theory is sound. Florida doesn't bother to reproduce the details of this research, instead presenting its conclusions in a series of bullet points. Nevertheless, it's possible to see what he's up to here—and it's a sleight of hand.

Florida uses the terms "city" and "region" interchangeably, so that when he talks about the healthy economies and demographics of creative "San Francisco" and "New York," he's actually referring to the huge super-regions surrounding these cities, encompassing vastly more people and jobs (and job growth) than the economically sluggish cities themselves.

Florida's "San Francisco," for example, stretches across the bay through the suburbs of Oakland in one direction, and down Route 101 some 40 miles to San Jose and its suburbs in the other, creating an economy more than three times the size of the city's real one. The real San Francisco, hip and cool as it might be, has not added a single new job for 30 years; boring, suburbanized San Jose, a city with virtually no downtown, has tripled in size over the same period, creating 600,000 jobs. Florida's "New York City" extends from the farthest reaches of northern and central New Jersey to the tip of Long Island. Like San Francisco, New York City proper has not contributed a single net new job to the regional economy in decades, even as un-hip Long Island and Jersey have increased their job count 170 percent and 75 percent, respectively.

Florida assumes that the regional economic growth has blossomed from the bohemian cultures of the central cities. That's dubious, to say the least. Indeed, Florida's own research shows that the fastest-growing areas of his supersize "New York City" are actually the least "creative." In a study he conducted after September 11, Florida found that economically thriving areas like Nassau-Suffolk and Monmouth-Ocean ranked way down on his bohemian and gay indexes, while stagnant New York City ranked near the top. If anything, Gotham's bohemian culture has encouraged the city's left-wing politics, whose legacy of high taxes, dysfunctional schools, and—until Rudy Giuliani came along in the nineties—scary crime rates has driven residents and businesses out of the city to the suburbs. We can say much the same about San Fran.

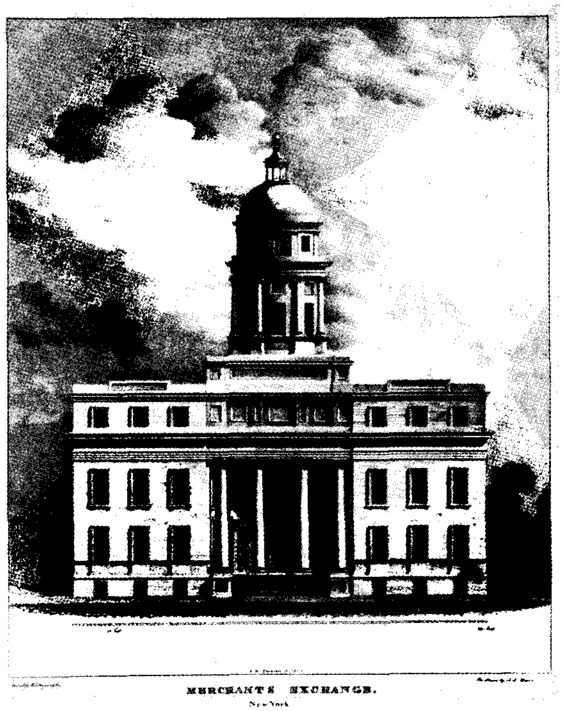
In fact, most of the growth in many big metropolitan regions nationwide is taking place far from the central cities and their hip urban culture. Respected Harvard economist Edward Glaeser, a longtime student of regional economic growth, observes that car-centered communities and sprawl are increasingly attractive to the American public. *New York Times* columnist David Brooks has vividly described the "booming exurban sprawls that have broken free of the gravitational pull of the cities and now float in a new space far beyond them."

Florida may be out of touch with what's driving the America's economy, but that doesn't stop him from tackling the rest of the world in *Flight.* America has long prospered economically because it has drawn so many immigrants to its shores, he tells us—hardly a new insight. But the talented global creative class that has sparked our recent technological boom is losing interest in coming here, Florida warns—with dire implications for our competitiveness.

The immediate causes of this growing disaffection with America, he maintains, are the Patriot Act, tougher post-9/11 visa restrictions, and the nation's deepening cultural conservatism. But the trouble began even before these unwelcome developments, Florida claims. He points to a study that indexed the "global tolerance" levels of people in 65 countries during the mid-nineties. The U.S. scored well behind Denmark, the Netherlands, Sweden, and other "advanced nations," primarily because we flunked the "values" component of the index that measured "to what degree a country reflects traditional or religious as opposed to modern or secular values"—with the modern presumed good and the traditional bad. The U.S. is just too religious and traditional to join the ranks of the "tolerant" societies, Florida maintains, and that means our economy will soon suffer, since we're turning off the creative types.

Florida's globalized creative-class theory has no more connection to economic reality than does his earlier work. Over the past decade, the U.S. economy has far outpaced most of the heavily taxed countries that sit atop the Global Tolerance Index, producing new jobs, for instance, at twice the rate of index leaders Sweden and Denmark. The U.S. has left in the dust Florida's favorite country: "the real leader in terms of tolerance and diversity . . . our northern neighbor, Canada." Canada ranks only slightly above average in per-capita gross domestic product among the 30 nations of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development; the U.S. ranks second. During the 1990s, when tolerant Canada should have been bursting with creative economic energy, its unemployment rate was nearly double that of the U.S.

Florida's policy prescriptions are mostly tired liberal platitudes. To encourage and attract the creative class, he variously calls for a "modern day equivalent of the New Deal" and a great national mustering of resources, comparable to our mobilization during World War II. He urges the Bush administration to stop being "obsessed" with homeland security, since it's hurting the nation's reputation with the creative class. He calls for a hike in the minimum wage, because, of course, our creative workers find themselves *so* underpaid these days. He wants to see vast increases in public spending on the arts and on "all forms of innovation and creativity," though he doesn't say who'll dole out the money (people like him, he doubtless assumes). He derides public school spending levels, seemingly unaware that we spend about twice as much per student on public education as do European countries, including those he wants us to emulate. Finally, he counsels us to replace our ideal of the melting pot with the newer, hipper, Canadian notion of the "mosaic society," which holds that . . .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Oh, never mind. It's too painful even to explain.

—*Steven Malanga*

In with the New

The liberal media's power continues to shrink, as the the new media's grows.

When Dan Rather retired a year early as anchor of *CBS Evening News* this March, his departure symbolized the end of an era of liberal media dominance and the onset of the new media era that is proving far friendlier to the ideas and arguments of the Right. Gone are the days when the Big Three networks, plus the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*, decided what was newsworthy, usually with a liberal spin.

Even if intrepid bloggers hadn't debunked Rather's specious September *60 Minutes II* scoop that President Bush shirked his National Guard duties decades ago—a humiliation to CBS that hastened the anchor's departure—the liberal media's power was dwindling. Ten years back, 60 percent of adult Americans regularly watched one of the Big Three evening newscasts; now only a third do. Worse still for the networks, the typical Big Three viewer is 60 years old, with less than 10 percent of the viewership between 18 and 34, the age group that advertisers covet—and the nation's future leaders. "All three programs, with their repeated focus on health issues, interspersed with commercials for products like Mylanta and Viagra, reflect this," observes *New Yorker* media critic Ken Auletta.

The big liberal dailies have taken heavy hits of late too, especially the *Times*, whose front-page Bush-bashing has dented its reputation. In 2004, Pew Research found that just 21 percent of those it surveyed felt that the "paper of record" reliably conveyed the truth, a figure below the reliability ratings of the *Wall Street Journal*, Fox News, CNN, and other news outlets on the same poll.

Increasingly, Americans are turning to new media sources for news. Around one in five now gets news from talk radio and 38 percent from cable TV broadcasts. But it's the Internet and the blogosphere that have won most of the attention of late, and rightly so: around 30 percent of Americans now get their news online, up dramatically from 15 percent in 2000. A new Gallup poll finds that 12 percent of Americans now read political blogs, roughly 26 million people using a medium that didn't really exist five years ago. "That may not make blogs a 'dominant' news source," says blogger and pollster Mark Blumenthal, "but one American in ten adds up to a lot of influence." Blog readership is 21 percent among 18- to 29-year-olds, 16 percent among 30- to 49-year-olds, and just 7 percent among the 65-and-older set—"a complete reversal of the typical age pattern for news consumption," notes Gallup. The blog readers are wealthy and well-educated, too, and break down about evenly between liberals and conservatives. If the networks are losing sway, these numbers show that the blogosphere is gaining it, fast.

Significantly, none of these new media is a liberal preserve. Conservatives still rule the radio dial; Right-friendly Fox News is the cable-news colossus, beating all its competitors combined in audience share; and many of the most influential Internet sites and blogs lean right, including the *Power Line* guys who helped sink CBS News.

Liberals have greeted these historic changes with fear and loathing. Fox News is a "fifth column," blusters Al Gore. Conservative talk radio is "niche entertainment for the spiritually unattractive," sneers *New Yorker* political writer Hendrik Hertzberg. The typical blogger is someone "sitting in his living room in his pajamas writing," charges former CBS executive and now head of CNN's news group Jonathan Klein. On and on the insults come, suggesting the degree of panic that the Left feels about the loss of its media monopoly.

Technology will only accelerate these trends. Not long from now, we'll be able to sit down at the breakfast table with a bigger, thinner, lighter version of today's Blackberry, boasting a more reader-friendly screen and—crucially—a wireless modem, and we'll scan, say, *Arts & Letters Daily*, *Drudge*, and *RealClearPolitics*. When you don't need to have a printed morning paper propped in front of you to get the news (still a morning ritual for lots of Americans), liberal media power will shrink even more.

The battle for "mind share" in the new media era, in other words, will get ever more fiercely competitive. And that's a good thing for America's politics and culture, however much teeth-gnashing you're hearing on the Left.

—Brian C. Anderson

The Charter School Revolution

Amistad Academy shows how good public schools *could* be.

Who are we proud to be?"

"Amistad Academy!"

"And why are we here?"

"To push ourselves, to learn, to achieve our very best."

"And who is responsible for your success?"

"We are responsible for our actions; we control our destinies."

"And what will it take to succeed?"

"Work, hard work!"

This encouraging scene—the "circle chant," it's called—is taking place in "morning circle" in the gym of what has swiftly become New Haven's superstar middle school. The six-year-old Amistad

Academy is a charter school, meaning that it's publicly funded but privately run, so it's free from some of the centrally imposed strictures, such as union work rules and curricular requirements, that stunt the city's traditional public schools.

Amistad has won national acclaim for blasting the test scores of some of Connecticut's neediest kids through the roof. While state testing in 2003 showed that only 23 percent of New Haven's traditional public school eighth-graders achieved mastery in math and that 31 percent mastered English, Amistad had 66 percent of its eighth-graders demonstrating math mastery and 71 percent English mastery—beating even the statewide averages.

How is Amistad getting such spectacular results? Critics charge that it's just skimming the city's best students from the public school system. But that's unlikely. Selected by lottery from all over New Haven, the students enter the school performing, on average, two years below grade level. Nearly all of Amistad's 220 students are black or Hispanic, and they come from poor families—84 percent are eligible for the free-lunch program. Nor is Amistad spending oodles on them: charter schools in Connecticut, as in most states, get less funding per pupil than traditional public schools, and not a cent for facilities.

At bottom, the reasons for Amistad's breathtaking success are pretty simple. For starters, it boasts a rigorous academic program. The Amistad curriculum is highly traditional, based on research-based methods. For reading, it's phonics, phonics, phonics, supplemented with literature when the kids are ready for it. The school uses the old-fashioned—and proven to work—Saxon Math program to teach 'rithmetic. And Amistad bases its history, science, and arts instruction on E. D. Hirsch's content-rich Core Knowledge program. What students need to know at every grade level, moreover, isn't flexible. Every six weeks the school assesses the kids, with the evaluations then used to figure out which students need help in what subjects. With an extended school day, mandatory summer school, and tutoring before and after school, there's time for students to catch up.

RUINS OF THE MERCHANT'S EXCHANGE N.Y.

COLLECTION OF THE NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY, NEGATIVE # 76200

Amistad kids hear every day not only that they can go to college, but also that they're *expected* to. Indeed, on the morning I visited, the school's cofounder and director, Dacia Toll, a Yale Law grad, announced a trip for eighth-graders to Washington College in Maryland—a yearly excursion at the school. Without getting a proper education, Toll points out, black and other minority students will never be able to take advantage of the legal and political gains made by their parents' and grandparents' generations. It was that belief that led Toll and her cofounder, fellow Yalie Stefan Pryor, to get Amistad off the ground, pulling together support from 30 New Haven–area backers. "New Haven has a culture of excuses," she tells me. "People always say you can't fix education until you fix poverty and racism—I see it as the reverse." Good schools tend to spring up around extraordinary, energetic principals, and Toll fits the mold.

Two other reasons for Amistad's achievement—a strong emphasis on personal responsibility and the creation of a vigorous school community—are both on display during morning circle. Calling the circle to order, a couple of kids beat African drums. And then the rhythmic chanting starts. All the kids have the circle chant written down on pieces of paper. Individual students read the questions; all respond. After the chants extolling hard work and conscientiousness come these:

"And how will we treat each other?"

"We will *respect* and *help* our classmates and teachers."

"And then what will we do?"

"We will give *back*—to our friends, our family, and to our city."

"And when will we do all of this?"

"Today, tomorrow, each and every day."

As this morning ritual suggests, Amistad has at least some of the trappings of an "Afrocentric" school. Indeed, Amistad takes its name from the nineteenth-century Cuban schooner whose cargo of slaves killed the captain and seized the ship, directing it to return to Africa; intercepted by a U.S. brig, the slaves wound up imprisoned in New Haven—hence the link of name and city—until a famous Supreme Court decision freed them. The circle chant's message of individual and communal virtue, though, transcends its multicultural framework. For kids who've been falling behind since birth, often with disorganized family backgrounds, it's an empowering message—a recipe for success in life.

Further morning-circle ceremonies reinforce that ethos. First come the "apologies" and "recognitions." On this morning, no apologies are necessary. But Amistad kids routinely must ask forgiveness from the school community for misbehavior: disrupting class, talking back to teachers, failing to do homework. As tough as Amistad is in its behavioral standards, however, it uses recognitions to lavish praise on accomplishments, even relatively minor ones. One teacher recognizes her class for showing enthusiasm for a guest speaker. Another recognizes a student for getting a good score on a grammar test. Toll, who teaches a writing class, recognizes several of her students for volunteering to read their work aloud in class. This practice of communal praising and shaming—all but unthinkable in regular public schools, with their self-esteem fixation and "child-centered" classrooms—tells students that their actions have meaningful consequences.

Amistad doesn't just place demands on students; it also requires a lot of educators. But they seem happy to give their all. Sue Walling, Amistad's young academic dean, bubbles over with energy. "One of my favorite things was when Dacia gave me a key to the school," she enthuses. Why? Because it made it easier to work late.

At Walling's old job, in a suburban Connecticut public school district, where she worked for four years, putting in long hours got her into trouble with her union. The union rep told her that working so much set a bad precedent—management could start asking *all* the teachers to work late. If she absolutely had to work extra, the rep went on, then she should at least hide her car. "I got the whole speech that this is a marathon, not a sprint," Walling recalls. "I could never go back."

Seeing teachers putting in such hard work instead of counting their clock time can impress the impressionable. Vanessa Torres, 14, was nervous about coming to Amistad, but these days she couldn't be happier. "The teachers here help you out a lot," she confides. At her old school, "they really didn't care." Now she doesn't even have much contact with her old public school friends, who're "always using improper grammar," she complains. Instead, she and her best pal from Amistad help keep each other focused. She says she wants to be a lawyer eventually, following Ms. Toll's example.

New York schools chancellor Joel Klein has invited Amistad to open five new schools in the Big Apple—two of which have been approved to open in the fall of 2005—part of his pledge to open 50 charter schools in the city between now and 2008. Seeing what a perfectly secular public school can accomplish if liberated from the modern public school system's bureaucratic entanglements makes you realize that urban public schools don't have to be pits of despair. In fact, it makes you ask: Why can't they all be this good?

—*Ryan Sager*

The Columbian Cartel

An ugly tradition continues at Columbia University.

In 1918 Herbert Hawkes, dean of Columbia College, decided that Jews were all right in their place, and that their place was a tiny fraction of the student body. He had his reasons: these folks not only bred like flies; they were also too, too pushy.

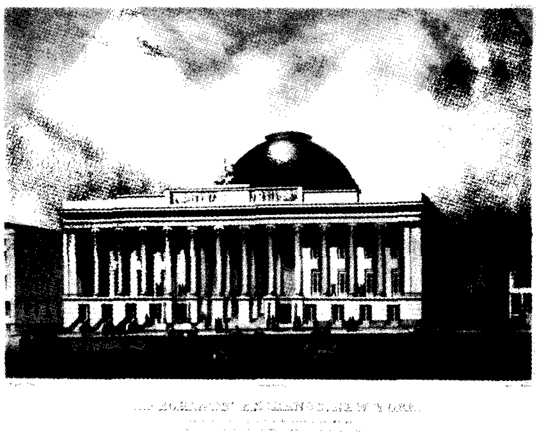
"It is a fact," wrote Hawkes, "that boys of foreign parentage who have no background in many cases attempt to educate themselves beyond their intelligence. Their accomplishment is over 100 percent of their ability on account of their tremendous energy and ambition. I do not believe however that a college would do well to admit too many men of low mentality who have ambitions but not brains."

Ah, those were the days. All a dean had to do was invent a fact, proclaim it gospel, and—voilà—the Hebrews had to look elsewhere for education. Hawkes's quota system lasted well into the 1940s. Among those barred was Richard Feynman, who pushed on to M.I.T., Princeton, and, eventually, the Nobel Prize.

But these days, Columbia is too worldly to exhibit such overt prejudice. Instead it has enshrined in its pantheon of faculty greats the late Edward Said—who lied about his deprived childhood in Jerusalem (he grew up in a rich Cairo suburb), proclaimed solidarity with violent Palestinians (and once threw rocks with them toward Israeli soldiers), and even accused Israel's founders of being Hitler's collaborators. Columbia seems to have viewed Said's fantasies as a revelation, elevating him to the pinnacle of the school's academic life.

When Said died two years ago, the university lost a leader to carry on its hallowed practices. But not to worry; lose a dragon's tooth and ten will take its place. Columbia's Edward Said Professorship of Modern Arab Studies and Literature, created in his honor, receives generous funding from the United Arab Emirates. The UAE's unelected president, one Sheik Zayed bin Sultan Al-Nahyan, also funded the now-folded Zayed Center, a "think tank" that promoted Holocaust denial, pushed the hoary (but perennially lethal) anti-Semitic czarist forgery *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, and theorized that Usama bin Ladin was actually a CIA agent.

The cat jumped completely out of the bag last year, after a documentary about anti-Semitism at Columbia began screening privately (and the *New York Sun* began reporting on the problem daily). A revised version of *Columbia Unbecoming* is now available through the David Project, the movie's Boston-based producer. In the film, students registered in the university's department of Middle East and Asian Languages and Cultures (MEALAC) speak of an atmosphere of anti-Semitism that suggests Cairo rather than New York City. Among the outrages: faculty members characterizing Palestinians as the "new Jews" and "Israelis" as the "new Nazis," and a professor of Arab politics refusing to answer a question from an Israeli student, instead snapping: "How many Palestinians have you killed?"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Columbia president Lee Bollinger professed concern about the revelations in an early version of *Columbia Unbecoming* and appointed an ad hoc committee to investigate. But the group featured friends and associates of the accused professors, as well as signers of a petition calling for divestment of companies doing business with Israel. Even so, many of Columbia's faculty criticize Bollinger for failing to stand firm against McCarthy-style anti-intellectual "intolerance and repression," the *New York Sun* reports, as well as for noting that academic freedom isn't license.

In a final comment on the pro-Islam bias of the Middle East faculty, a student concludes: "They teach everything in the context of one special, small struggle, when there are 23 countries out there where minorities are being oppressed, where women are bound to their homes, where homosexuals are being put in jail. They're ignoring the rest of the Middle East in favor of a small dimension of it."

But as all alumni know, tradition is what makes a university great. Of course, it's also what can make it contemptible, but what is that to Columbia? For its administrators, there are obviously bigger things than tolerance and truth. Sheiks with money, for example—and professors without honor.

—Stefan Kanfer

What's Holding Black Kids Back?

Bill Cosby
is right: the
problem is
the parents.

SPENCER GRANT/PHOTOEDIT, INC.

Kay S. Hymowitz

In January, almost 2,000 people jammed the auditorium at Wayne County Community College in Detroit in order to hear Bill Cosby yell at them—there's really no other way to put it—for being bad parents. That was after a crowd had already filled a hall in Newark. And another in Springfield, Massachusetts. And another in Milwaukee. And yet another in Atlanta.

Had Cosby not gone into quarantine as the result of sexual-abuse charges that prosecutors say they are no longer pursuing, there's no question that thousands more poor black parents would have come to town-hall meetings, asking the comedian-activist to harangue them, too. They would have waited in line to hear Cosby say the same sort of thing he said in front of the NAACP on the 50th anniversary of the Supreme Court's *Brown* decision last May when he started his crusade: "The lower economic people are not holding up their end of the deal. These people are not parenting!" Or the litany he presented in a Paula Zahn interview: "You got to straighten up your house! Straighten up your apartment! Straighten up your child!" Wearing a sweatshirt with the motto "Parent Power!" he doubtless would have blasted the "poverty pimps and victim pimps" who blame their children's plight on racial injustice. "Proper education has to begin at home. . . . We don't need another federal commission to study the problem. . . . What we need now is parents sitting down with children, overseeing homework, sending children off to school in the morning, well fed, rested, and ready to learn."

Now Bill Cosby is a big star and all, but at 67, he's not exactly Beyoncé. Why would people hang from the rafters in order to hear

It's the family, not the school, that forms children's worldviews.

an aging sitcom dad accuse them of raising "knuckleheads"? The commentariat, black and white, sure didn't have an answer. BILLIONAIRE BASHES POOR BLACKS, the *New York Times* headlined columnist Barbara Ehrenreich's attack on Cosby's critique. *Newsweek* columnist Ellis Cose admitted that there was some truth to Cosby's charges, but objected, "The basic question is whether criticizing such behavior is enough to change it." Hip-hop entrepreneur Russell Simmons harrumphed an answer to Cose's question: "Judgment of the people in this situation is not helpful." In his Paula Zahn interview, Cosby told how ex-poet laureate Maya Angelou had chided him in similar terms: "You know, Bill, you're a very nice man, but you have a big mouth."

Well, that's the point, isn't it? Cosby was filling auditoriums precisely because he *has* a big mouth, because he *was* being judgmental. His blunt talk seemed a refreshing tonic to the sense that the standard bromides about the inner city's troubles weren't getting blacks very far. Forty years after the War on Poverty began, about 30 percent of black children are still living in poverty. Those children face an even chance of dropping out of high school and, according to economist Thomas Hertz, a 42 percent chance of staying in the lowest income decile—far greater than the 17 percent of whites born at the bottom who stay there. After endless attempts at school reform and a gazillion dollars' worth of what policymakers call "interventions," just about everyone realizes—without minimizing the awfulness of ghetto schools—that the problem begins at home and begins early. Yet the assumption among black leaders and poverty experts has long been that you can't expect uneducated, highly stressed parents, often themselves poorly reared, to do all that much about it. Cosby is saying that they can.

And about that, he is right.

Let's start with a difficult truth behind Cosby's rant: 40 years and trillions of government dollars have not given black and white children equal chances. Put aside the question of the public schools for now; the problem begins way before children first go through their shabby doors. Black kids enter school significantly below their white peers in everything from vocabulary to number awareness to self-control. According to a 1998 National Center for Education Statistics survey of kindergarten teachers, black children are much less likely to show persistence in school tasks, to pay close attention in class, or to seem eager to learn new things than are their white counterparts; Hispanic children fall midway in between. As a 2002 book from the liberal Economic Policy Institute, *Inequality at the Starting Gate*, puts it, "[D]isadvantaged [disproportionately black] children start kindergarten with significantly lower cognitive skills than their more advantaged counterparts." Dismayingly, the sentence might have come straight from a government commission on poverty, circa 1964—before the War on Poverty had spent a dime.

And what about Head Start, perhaps the best-known War on Poverty campaign, which was supposed "to bring these kids to the starting line equal," as President Johnson put it at the time? Head Start rested on the reasonable assumption that crucial to fighting poverty was to compensate for what was—or, more to the point, was not—happening at home. If poor kids arrived at school less prepared than their more well-to-do counterparts, well, then, give them more of what those other kids were getting: more stories, building blocks, and puzzles, more talk, more edifying adult attention—as well as good nutrition and health care. Although in retrospect, the first Head Start program in the heady summer of 1965—designed to last all of eight weeks—was wildly unrealistic, the approach still made sense. Poor kids would get a concentrated injection of middle-class child rearing in preschool, and they would start school ready to learn, to achieve at the same rate as their better-off peers, and eventually to live as well as they did.

Except it didn't work out that way. As a lingering reminder of the hopes and idealism that surrounded the War on Poverty, Head Start, with its annual budget of $6.8 billion, remains a sentimental favorite of the public and of Congress. But the truth is, from the first time they parsed the data, Head Start researchers found that while children sometimes enjoyed immediate gains in IQ and social competence, these improvements tended to fade by the time kids hit third grade. The failed promise of Head Start might best be captured by a visit I made several years ago to a Head Start program in a housing project on Manhattan's Lower East Side, a cheerful and orderly place that would satisfy anyone's definition of quality child care. As I was leaving, an administrator introduced me to a young woman of 21 or so just arriving with her four-year-old. "This is Sonia," he said proudly. "She went here when *she* was a little girl." Not only had Head Start failed to prevent a poor child from becoming a teen mother, but a Head Start administrator didn't even seem to think that it was supposed to. For him—and, one suspects, for many teachers and parents—Head Start had come to be nothing more than a nice neighborhood preschool; it wasn't meant to change lives, and it boasted with institutional pride of what elite private schools and colleges call legacies.

That doesn't mean preschool has never helped impoverished black children—not by any means. One reason so many are convinced that "Head Start works" is that it is often blurred—sometimes with deliberate fudging by advocates—with several other programs that have had heartening results: the Abecedarian Project at the University of North Carolina and the Perry Preschool in Ypsilanti, Michigan. In 1972, in perhaps the most intensive intervention tried in the United States short of adoption, the Abecedarian Project put 57 very high-risk children into a five-year infant and preschool program, where highly trained teachers worked on what child developmentalists call "fine-motor, language, and social-emotional skills." When the kids hit age 21, they still showed some gains over a control group: they had better jobs, three times as many of them went to college, and they were half as likely to be teen parents. The graduates of Perry Preschool, a more conventional two-year program, were less likely than the control group to have been placed in special education or to have been arrested, and were more likely to graduate high school, to have higher monthly earnings as adults, and to own homes.

Still, both of these programs were extremely small. Between them, we're talking a grand total of 115 children, who enjoyed expertly constructed, exquisitely staffed arrangements, unlikely to be replicable on a large scale. Saying that "preschool works" based on these model programs makes as much sense as saying that because NASA successfully launched a mission to Mars, so can JetBlue.

These days, especially given the public's sticker shock after four decades of government programs, the vast community of child developmentalists and antipoverty advocates—to its credit—has adopted a more sober tone than at any time since the 1960s. As recently as 1988, War on Poverty veteran Lisbeth Schorr trumpeted that success was near, in her book *Within Our Reach*: "We now know that the education, health, nutrition, and social services and parent support have prevented and ameliorated many of the educational handicaps associated with growing up in poverty," giving us results that are "measurable and dramatic." (Perry Preschool is one of the three early-childhood programs she cites.) You're not going to hear that kind of talk today. "Do You Believe in Magic?" is the half-bitter title of a 2003 article on preschool intervention by Columbia University Teachers College professor Jeanne Brooks-Gunn, one of the titans of early-childhood research. Edward Zigler, a Head Start founder, has urged experts in the field to "become realistic and temper our hopes." For the bitter truth is that even in the best programs that money can buy, what we're looking at is not equality but damage control, not a middle-class future but "risk prevention."

"The difficult truth: 40 years and trillions of dollars have not given black and white children equal chances."

So why have we been able to make so little headway in improving the life chances of poor black children? One reason towers over all others, and it's the one Cosby was alluding to, however crudely, in his town-hall meetings: poor black parents rear their children very differently from the way middle-class parents do, and even by the time the kids are four years old, the results are extremely hard to change. Academics and poverty mavens know this to be the case, though they try to soften the harshness of its implications. They point out—correctly—that poor parents say they want the same things for their kids that everyone does: a good job, a nice home, and a satisfying family life. They observe that poor parents don't have the money or the time or the psychological well-being to do a lot of the quasi-educational things that middle-class parents do with their young children, such as going to the circus or buying Legos. They argue that educational deprivation means that the poor don't know the best child-rearing methods; they have never taken Psych 101, nor have their friends presented them with copies of *What to Expect: The Toddler Years* at their baby showers.

But these explanations shy away from the one reason that renders others moot: poor parents raise their kids differently, because they see being

parents differently. They are not simply middle-class parents *manqué*; they have their own culture of child rearing, and—not to mince words—that culture is a recipe for more poverty. Without addressing that fact head-on, not much will ever change.

Social scientists have long been aware of an immense gap in the way poor parents and middle-class parents, whatever their color, treat their children, including during the earliest years of life. On the most obvious level, middle-class parents read more to their kids, and they use a larger vocabulary, than poor parents do. They have more books and educational materials in the house; according to *Inequality at the Starting Gate*, the average white child entering kindergarten in 1998 had 93 books, while the average black child had fewer than half that number. All of that seems like what you would expect given that the poor have less money and lower levels of education.

“Low-income parents talk less to their kids and are more likely to give commands or prohibitions when they do talk.”

But poor parents differ in ways that are less predictably the consequences of poverty or the lack of high school diplomas. Researchers find that low-income parents are more likely to spank or hit their children. They talk less to their kids and are more likely to give commands or prohibitions when they do talk: “Put that fork down!” rather than the more soccer-mommish, “Why don’t you give me that fork so that you don’t get hurt?” In general, middle-class parents speak in ways designed to elicit responses from their children, pointing out objects they should notice and asking lots of questions: “That’s a horse. What does a horsie say?” (or that middle-class mantra, “What’s the magic word?”). Middle-class mothers also give more positive feedback: “That’s right! Neigh! What a smart girl!” Poor parents do little of this.

Parental involvement and concern helps kids flourish in school.

GERARD FRITZ/STOCKPHOTO.COM

The difference between middle-class and low-income child rearing has been captured at its starkest—and most unsettling—by Betty Hart and Todd R. Risley in their 1995 book *Meaningful Differences*. As War on Poverty foot soldiers with a special interest in language development, Hart and Risley were troubled by the mediocre results of the curriculum they had helped design at the Turner House Preschool in a poor black Kansas City neighborhood. Comparing their subjects with those at a lab school for the children of University of Kansas professors, Hart and Risley found to their dismay that not only did the university kids know more words than the Turner kids, but they *learned faster*. The gap between upper- and lower-income kids, they concluded, “seemed unalterable by intervention by the time the children were 4 years old.”

Trying to understand why, their team set out to observe parents and children in their homes doing the things they ordinarily did—hanging out, talking, eating dinner, watching television. The results were mind-boggling: in the first years of life, the average number of words heard per hour was 2,150 for professors’ kids, 1,250 for working-class children, and 620 for children in welfare families.

But the problem went further. Welfare parents in the study didn’t just talk less; their talk was meaner and more distracted. Consider this description of two-year-old Inge and her mother:

> Inge’s mother is sitting in the living room watching television. Inge . . . gets her mother’s keys from the couch. Her mother initiates, “Bring them keys back here. You ain’t going nowhere.”
>
> Inge drops [a] spoon on the coffee table. Her mother initiates, “O.K., now leave it alone, O.K., Inge?” . . . When she picks the spoon up again, her mother initiates, “Come here. Let me bite you if you gonna keep on meddling.” Inge goes

> on playing; when she bangs the spoon on the coffee table, her mother initiates, "Inge, stop."
>
> . . . Inge sits on the couch beside her to watch TV and says something incomprehensible. Mother responds, "Quit copying off of me. You a copy cat." . . . Inge gets a ball and says, "Ball." Her mother says, "It's a ball." Inge says "Ball," and her mother repeats "Ball." When Inge throws the ball over by the TV as she repeats words from a commercial, her mother responds, "You know better. Why you do that? . . . Don't throw it no more."

It's easy to spot what's wrong here. Inge's mother does not try to interest her daughter in anything—though observers noted that there were toys, including a plastic stethoscope, in the house. A different mother might pick up the stethoscope, call it by its name, pretend to use it, and invite the child to do the same. Instead, Inge's mother's communication can largely be summed up by the word "no." You can't chalk this up to a lack of feeling. Hart and Risley observe that the mother is "concerned, nurturing and affectionate"; at other points in the transcript, she kisses and hugs her child, dresses her, and makes sure she gets to the bathroom when she needs to. Nor can you argue that she simply doesn't know how to engage or teach her child. Notice that she repeats the word "ball" to reinforce her daughter's learning; at other times, she points out that a character on television is sleeping. But she does all this as if it were an afterthought rather than, as a middle-class mother might, one of the first rules of parenting.

In other words, Inge's mother seems to lack not so much a set of skills as the motivation to bring them to bear in a consistent, mindful way. In middle-class families, the child's development—emotional, social, and (these days, above all) cognitive—takes center stage. It is the family's raison d'être, its state religion. It's the reason for that Mozart or Rafi tape in the morning and that bedtime story at night, for finding out all you can about a teacher in the fall and for Little League in the spring, for all the books, crib mobiles, trips to the museum, and limits on TV. It's the reason, even, for careful family planning; fewer children, properly spaced, allow parents to focus ample attention on each one. Just about everything that defines middle-class parenting—talking to a child, asking questions, reasoning rather than spanking—consciously aims at education or child development. In *The Family in the Modern Age*, sociologist Brigitte Berger traces how the nuclear family arose in large measure to provide the environment for the "family's great educational mission."

The Mission, as we'll call it, was not a plot against women. It was the answer to a problem newly introduced by modern life: how do you shape children into citizens in a democratic polity and self-disciplined, self-reliant, skilled workers in a complex economy? It didn't take all that much solicitude to prepare kids to survive in traditional, agricultural societies. That's not the case when it comes to training them to prosper in an individualistic, commercial, self-governing republic. "[I]n no other family system do children play a more central role than in that of the conventional nuclear family," Berger writes. For good reason.

Periodically, social critics warn of the nuclear family's impending implosion—most recently in the *New York Times* style section warnings about "hyperparenting" and in Judith Warner's new book, only semi-hyperbolically entitled *Perfect Madness* and featured in a recent *Newsweek* cover story. But though future books and articles will doubtless lament the excesses of the nuclear family, though future housewives will become desperate, and though the Mission will creep into ever-new crevices of domestic life, the stubborn truth will remain that child-centeredness is the only way parents can raise successful children in our society. According to Berger, when working properly, the bourgeois, nuclear family is by its very definition a factory for producing competent, self-reliant, and (at its most successful) upwardly mobile children. Close the factory, as in the disappearance of the inner-city two-parent family, and you risk shutting down the product line.

Missionary skeptics also miss another truth. The Mission aims at far more than promoting children's self-reliance or ensuring that they make the soccer team or get into an impressive college. The Mission's deepest ideal is the pursuit of happiness. In their minivan runs to swim meets and choir practices, middle-class parents are giving their children a chance to discover their talents, as well as to learn the self-discipline that makes those talents shine. In the best scenario, the project leads not only to satisfying work lives, but to full self-development and self-cultivation.

The Mission aims to pass on to the next generation the rich vision of human possibility inherent in the American project, and to enlist them into passing down that vision to yet another generation, in what sociologists used to call "the reproduction of society." What goes around, comes around.

"In middle-class families, the child's development—emotional, social, and cognitive—takes center stage."

You don't have to have a Ph.D. to know that many poor parents have not signed up for the Mission, but some academics have added to our understanding of this fact. Annette Lareau, author of *Unequal Childhoods*—perhaps the most extensive comparative ethnography of poor and middle-class parents of school-age children—describes the child-rearing philosophy among the poor and much of the working class as "natural growth." Natural-growth believers are fatalists; they do not see their role as shaping the environment so that Little Princes or Princesses will develop their minds and talents, because they assume that these will unfold as they will. As long as a parent provides love, food, and safety, she is doing her job.

Inner-city parents are often intensely critical of their neighbors who "do nothin' for their kids," as one of Lareau's subjects puts it, but that criticism is pretty much limited to those who don't provide clean clothes or a regular dinner or who let their kids hang out too late at night. Talking or reading to a young child or taking him to the zoo are simply not cultural requirements. Christina Wray, a Michigan nurse working with the Nurse-Family Partnership (NFP), one of the most successful programs for poor, young first-time mothers, says that when she encourages these mothers to talk to their babies, they often reply, "Why would I talk to him? He can't answer me." Mothers describe playing with or cuddling a baby or toddler, obligatory in suburban homes, as "spoiling."

Natural-growth theory also helps explain why inner-city parents don't monitor their teenagers as closely as middle-class parents do. For middle-class Missionaries, the teenager is still developing his brain and talents; if anything, his parents' obligations intensify to incorporate 6 AM swim practices and late-evening play rehearsals. But according to natural-growth theory, a teenager is fully grown. Dawn Purdom, one of Christina Wray's colleagues in Michigan, says that the mothers of teenage daughters she sees are more likely to look like their high school friends than their parents. "They watch TV programs together, they listen to the same music, they talk about their sexual relationships. . . . It's not like one is a leader or a role model and the other is a follower. There are no boundaries like that."

Obviously, race has nothing to do with whether people become natural-growth-theory parents or Missionaries. In *Unequal Childhoods*, Lareau describes the daily ministrations of a black couple, a lawyer and a corporate manager, to their only child, Alexander, that would make Judith Warner blanch. The boy takes piano and guitar lessons, plays basketball and baseball, is in the school play and the church choir. "Daily life in the Williams house owes much of its pace and rhythm to Alexander's schedule," Lareau writes. The whole household is geared toward "developing Alexander." The first words out of both parents' mouths at the end of every day, no matter how long and stressful, are: "Have you started your homework?" or "What do you have to finish for tomorrow?" The fact that he has two married parents is an immense advantage for Alexander: together, mother and father form a kind of conspiracy to develop him, a labor-intensive and emotionally demanding project difficult enough for two parents. Lareau's sample is extremely small, but surely it is no statistical accident that all of her middle-class children are growing up with their own two parents, while her poor children are growing up in homes without their fathers.

You could argue, of course, that the Mission simply costs too much for poor parents to enlist; Little League uniforms and piano lessons cost money, after all. But observers of the inner city have found numerous poor parents who seek out—and find—ways to do a lot of what middle-class parents do. They locate community centers or church groups with after-school activities. More important, they organize the household around school activities and homework. Unlike one of Lareau's poor subjects, who hardly responds when she hears that her son is not doing his homework—because "in her view it is up to the teachers to manage her son's education. That is their job, not hers"—plenty of poor parents not only say that education is important but actively "manage" their children's educations. DePaul University professor William A. Sampson sent trained observers into the homes of a number of poor black families in Evanston, Illinois—some with high-achieving children, some with low-achieving. Though the field workers didn't go in knowing which children were which, they quickly found that the high achievers had parents who intuitively understood the Mission.

These parents, usually married couples, imposed routines that reinforced the message that school came first, before distractions like television, friends, or video games. In the homes of low achievers, mothers came home from work and either didn't mention homework or quickly became distracted from the subject. Sampson's book only describes school-age children, so we don't know how these families differed when their children were infants or toddlers, but it's a good bet that the parents of high achievers did not start showing an interest in learning only the day their kids started kindergarten. In the ways that matter for children, these are "middle-class, lower-class families," Sampson explains in *Black Student Achievement*. "The neighborhood is not responsible for the difference. Neither is race. Neither is income." No, only the parents.

Knowing that middle-class parents better prepare kids for school, social scientists have designed an array of programs to encourage poor mothers to act more like middle-class mothers. And sometimes the programs have some modest impact. In a recent survey of the literature, Jeanne Brooks-Gunn enumerates studies showing various programs that have increased maternal sensitivity, reduced spanking, "improv[ed] parents' ability to assist in problem-solving activities," and taught mothers to ask questions and to initiate conversations about the books they read to their children.

Trouble is, such programs treat the parent not as a human being with a mind, a worldview, and values, but as a subject who performs a set of behaviors. They teach procedural parenting. David Burkam, a co-author of *Inequality at the Starting Gate*, explains, "The way that we [social scientists] try to make sense of the world is to break the world into small little bits and pieces and try to say which little piece is important." So they come up with a little piece that seems important, and that, not coincidentally, is directly observable and measurable—like, say, discipline—and they try to find a way to teach a poor mother to reason or give a time-out, rather than spank her child. They design an intervention, and they do the research to see if they have changed a mother's behavior and improved the child's situation. If the answer is yes, if there are "positive effects," the intervention is deemed a success and becomes part of the catalog of programs for improving children's chances.

But it should be clear by now that being a middle-class—or an upwardly mobile immigrant—

ANNIE GRIFFITHS BELT/CORBIS

Regardless of race, loving two-parent families raise kids likely to succeed.

mother or father does not mean simply performing a checklist of proper behaviors. It does not mean merely following procedures. It means believing on some intuitive level in the Mission and its larger framework of personal growth and fulfillment. In the case of poor parents, that means having an imagination of a better life, if not for you, then for your kids. That's what makes the difference.

It is this inner parent, the human being endowed with aspiration, capable of self-betterment and of reaching toward a better future, that Bill Cosby was trying to awaken in his notorious town-hall meetings. Cosby struck many as insufficiently sensitive to the challenges that the inner-city poor face. Perhaps. But the people pouring into his lectures were not looking for sympathy. They were looking for inspiration, a vision of a better self implicit in Cosby's chastisements. This is a self that procedural parenting ignores.

No one could reasonably expect Cosby's crusade to change much on its own. But as part of a broader cultural argument from the bully pulpits of government, churches, foundations, and academia, it is essential. It is at that point that interventions—and schooling—can have "positive effects" worth crowing about.

Heralds of a Brighter Black Future

More and more, African-American iconoclasts reject victimology and embrace American possibility.

DALE GULDAN/MILWAUKEE JOURNAL SENTINEL

Heather Mac Donald

When Bill Cosby, in a speech to the NAACP last May, let fly a merciless condemnation of black illegitimacy, educational apathy, and the idea that white racism causes black social problems, political commentators dropped their jaws. They remained stunned when he vented similar frustration to audiences across the country over the next six months. Sure, "civil rights" advocates have been known, on rare occasions, to criticize self-defeating black behavior, but convention requires that after briefly denouncing, say, black-on-black crime (as if black-on-white crime would be okay), the "leader" should turn his attention to the racial injustice that allegedly causes such crime and harp on that for the next year or so. This Cosby refused to do. "It's not what [the white man] is doing to you; it's what you're not doing," he thundered in Detroit.

The reaction of black audiences was just as unexpected. Rather than take offense, they waited hours in line, in blistering heat and freezing cold, to hear Cosby deliver his impassioned plea for bourgeois behavior.

Cosby's tough-love campaign foundered in January, when a woman accused him of sexually assaulting her the previous year; he denied the charge, but has not been heard from since. No need to wait for him to find his voice again, however. Dozens of grassroots black conservatives have been delivering the same message of personal responsibility—in as

David A. Clarke: "I will not play Pontius Pilate . . . just to remain popular in the black community."

electrifying a fashion—for years without generating a glimmer of interest from the press. Routinely denounced as pariahs and race-traitors, they nevertheless believe that they are speaking for the silent majority of blacks. Now that Cosby has exposed the untapped audience for straight talk, maybe the media will finally pay attention to these unknown iconoclasts. Nothing would help black Americans more than for the mainstream press to give such honesty and hard-won wisdom the respect it deserves.

"How can anyone in their right mind accept reparations?" asks Rapheal Adams incredulously. "I would *never* accept them," he says, pressing his hands to his chest. "I don't have shackles." Suddenly solemn, Adams intones melodramatically: " 'Four hundred years ago, they brought us here!' " He squints skeptically: "Yeah? You're lookin' pretty good for 400 years old. Guess what? The slaves have been dead a long time. Show me where the 'Colored Only–Whites Only' signs are in this country . . . *anywhere*. Everyone agrees slavery was horrific, but you have to look at what people did to *end* it. I'm sorry, you're not owed one damn dime."

Rapheal Adams is a dissenter in Cincinnati, seat of the country's most vicious race politics. Until recently, the ebullient 43-year-old fought the city's racial arsonists as a host on black talk radio, working the night shift at a General Electric jet-engine plant in order to promote his views during the day. When race riots erupted in 2001, Adams, as the sole pro-police counter-demonstrator at an anti-cop rally, barely escaped assault.

The hatred directed at him by Cincinnati's race-baiters has had no effect on his high spirits. Over bacon and pancakes in an outlying Cincinnati shopping plaza, he parodied black victocrat dogma and countered it with his own exasperated common sense. Despite his hip exterior—shaved head, tiny retro glasses, and sleek black turtleneck over a slender frame—Adams is remarkably old-fashioned. When a classmate handed him a joint in the seventh grade, he handed it back, because his mother had never mentioned such things to him. His filial respect remains unwavering today. "My parents are the most important people in my life," the air force vet explained in a heartfelt letter he sent before we met. "They instilled in me a very important lesson about the value of right vs. wrong." As for his grandparents, "They're deceased, but I carry them with me every second of my life. My grandfather grew up in Chattanooga, Tennessee, at a time when black men were not allowed onto the sidewalks. He gave me this lesson: 'You can't condemn someone for his skin color. If you can't be nice to people, there's something wrong with *you*,' " Adams urges emphatically, pointing for emphasis. "My grandfather never gave me hand-me-down misery."

By contrast, the anointed civil rights leaders, Adams says, constantly manufacture racial resentment to stay in power. "Conyers, Mfume, Sharpton, Jackson—these people can't go before a camera, they can't go to *sleep*, without pushing the 'get-whitey' syndrome. There was Jackson down in Florida in 2000, talking about 'dis-en-franchise-ment,' " Adams rolls out the syllables portentously. "Oh, really? Go to Dade County and check out the educational level of the population. The Democrats were taking U-Hauls and vans to cart anyone they could find to the polls. 'But I've never voted in my life!' their captives said. 'Don't worry, you just get in there and press the lever for Gore.' But these people couldn't *read*, they didn't know what the hell was going on. Why doesn't anyone talk about voter irresponsibility?"

The "get-whitey" syndrome now permeates black culture, Adams observes, destroying the spirit of self-help. "It's so disheartening for black people to try to pin blame on every white person." Adams recalls Jesse Jackson's 1999 lawsuit against the Decatur, Illinois, school district for having expelled six ninth-graders for a vicious football-stadium brawl. "Now we call school discipline 'disciplinary profiling.' See how twisted that is!" He shakes his head incredulously. "People say: 'We're more boisterous; that's our culture.' No. You can't just stand up and shout at your teacher; you're embracing behavior that others see as wrong."

The flip side of the "get-whitey" syndrome is the "acting-white" syndrome. "Anything of value, that's 'white,' " observes Adams. "Standing with your pregnant girlfriend, that's 'white.' Staying away from gangs, 'white.' Wearing pants where they're supposed to be—on your waist—'white.' '*We* wear our pants below our butt line.' It is so sick. If you're not acting out in school, you're an Uncle Tom, you're 'white.' "

Adams's parents watched the romanticization of underclass culture in the 1970s with alarm and predicted that it would spell the black community's downfall. "In 1970, 1972, you had the start of the *Superfly* period," Adams recalls. "Do you know the things that we celebrated? Pimping, drugs—they all showed up in Blaxploitation movies. It destroyed the advances of the civil rights movement. Medgar Evers, in his suit, tie, and white shirt—it all got stripped out. People said: 'Man, we're done with that; it's time to let our hair down,' " Adams says in a lilting, super-cool glide. "We glorified street life, the projects. The *Superfly* period morphed into the gangsta culture of the mid-eighties, and now we're glorifying violent criminals."

Today's self-designated "civil rights" leaders are cowards, Adams charges, because they refuse to challenge dysfunctional black behavior. "The battle that really should be going on is against the enemy that looks like you—the father who abandons his children or rapes women or sells drugs. Those are the people you need to fight, but you're scared. Because they look like you, you don't want to get your hands bloody."

Adams shares no such reluctance for the necessary fight.

David A. Clarke, the towering sheriff of Milwaukee County, Wisconsin, electrified Milwaukee in 2003 with his candid expression of disgust at the scapegoating of police. Lamarr Nash, a 24-year-old criminal, had stolen a truck and then led the police on a 17-mile high-speed highway chase, ending when he crashed into a deputy's squad car. Nash exited the truck with his hands up and lay down on the asphalt. The deputies surrounded him, and for a brief moment, one put his foot on Nash's neck, without causing any injury.

Predictably, the black civil rights establishment erupted in rage at this instance of police "brutality." The NAACP called a meeting to denounce the police. At the meeting, Sheriff Clarke asked the crowd if they thought the offending deputy was a racist. The verdict was yes. Interesting, said Clarke; here's his picture. The deputy was black.

Afterward, Clarke fired off an e-mail to a local talk-show host, Charlie Sykes, which Sykes read on the air. It was a classic Clarkean counterthrust. "I sat at the community meeting held at the NAACP on Saturday in utter disbelief and disgust at another failed opportunity for leadership. . . . Like sheep, the black legislators marched up to the microphone criticizing law enforcement, using words such as oppression [and] racism. . . . They spoke about Nash as if he was some sort of icon in the struggle to achieve equality and deserving to be mentioned in the same breath as people like Rosa Parks. I, for the world, cannot figure out why someone engaged in felonious conduct, conduct that used to meet with condemnation and shame among blacks, was exalted into folk-hero status. Not one of these elected officials did the hard thing, which would have been to speak of the conduct of Mr. Nash as reprehensible, abhorrent, and unacceptable."

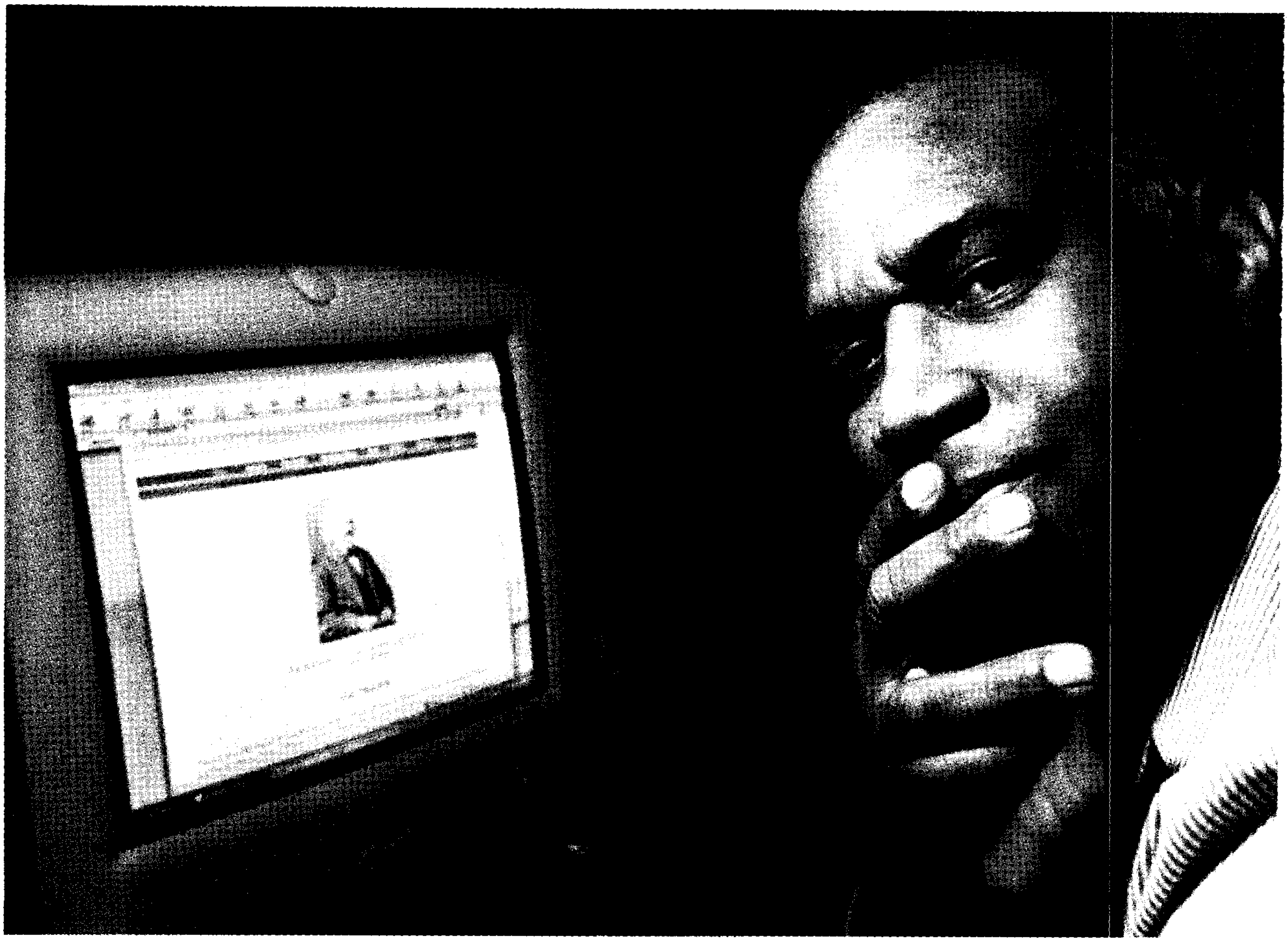
Clarke's e-mail set off a firestorm. Like Cosby, he was condemned for airing dirty laundry in public. A municipal judge accused him of pandering to the "right-wing conservative . . . reactionary crowd." A *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* columnist accused *Clarke*—not the NAACP—of playing the "race card."

Standard behavior for the victimologists, Clarke wrote. These apologists adopt "victimhood as an identity and exaggerate it. They give failure, lack of effort, and even criminality a tacit stamp of approval. This is done not with a view toward forging solutions but to foster and nurture an unfocused brand of resentment and sense of alienation from the mainstream."

> **“'The *Superfly* period morphed into the gangsta culture. . . and now we're glorifying violent criminals.'”**

The 48-year-old sheriff exudes a dignified command presence, which does not prevent him from hitting back hard, sarcastically, and often against his critics in Milwaukee and his ideological foes nationally. Learning of an ACLU attorney's statement that he "hated the sheriff's office," Clarke responded: "I take great pride in it. The feelings are mutual." He regularly pens op-eds about the bankrupt civil rights "leadership," which the local press, including black newspapers, just as regularly refuses to publish. Clarke then gives them to Charlie Sykes to read on the radio. One such op-ed, "Herd Mentality," scoffed at Al Sharpton's presumption to speak for all blacks and said of the Democratic Party: "A wise man once told me that if the horse is dead—dismount." "Plantation Politics" likened the attacks on Bill Cosby to the punishment of blacks who dared to run away from slavery.

Where does Sheriff Clarke get his self-possession? "I was raised to think independently and for myself," he explains in his deep voice. His father is responsible for his indifference to racial appeals. The elder Clarke joined the army rangers at 16 and fought in Korea in a segregated unit. "You'd think he'd become resentful, but when he came out, he had learned how to become a man and harbored no ill will." As a result, Clarke says, he didn't grow up "hating white people." When someone called him a nigger, his father told him to get over it. "I grew up



Don Scoggins: "Socialism destroyed the black community."

not dwelling on our blackness. We knew we were black, but we didn't see it as being different." Instead, his parents emphasized the cultivation of personal virtue. Clarke went through a black radical period in his twenties, complete with a big Afro, he recounts matter-of-factly, but he grew out of it. Today, Clarke says, "I refuse to view everything through a racial lens."

That refusal puts him in the minority in talking about black crime, where the usual drill requires immediately changing the topic from a criminal's act to his race, a free pass to exculpatory victimhood. Like every police chief in the country, Clarke regularly faces charges of "racial profiling." But unlike many other police chiefs, he gives unwavering support to his officers, when merited. While he would never excuse brutality, Clarke said in his e-mail to Charlie Sykes, he backed the deputies in the Lamarr Nash arrest because they risked their lives to protect innocent motorists in an incident "started not by law enforcement, but by Lamarr Nash." With typical feistiness, Clarke declared: "I will not play Pontius Pilate and offer a member of this organization up as a sacrificial lamb just to remain popular in the black community."

Clarke's indifference to specious "racial-profiling" allegations underlies his support for consent searches, a vital law enforcement tool and prime target of anti-police agitation. An officer, observing suspicious behavior, can ask the individual, often a motorist, for consent to search his person or property. Such searches regularly turn up guns and other contraband. The ACLU calls them a racist tool. In response, less fearless police commanders have banned the practice; Clarke couldn't care less.

The welfare-industrial complex is none too happy with Clarke, either, since he insists that taxpayer-funded social programs show results. He opposed Milwaukee's continuing award of federal block-grant money to an "anti-gang" program that could not account for the public funds that it had already gobbled up. With typical take-no-prisoners aggressiveness, Clarke demanded from the city all documentation relating to the program and answers to rigorous questions about how the city evaluates grantees. He then alerted the local U.S. attorney and Wisconsin's congressional and senatorial delegations to his concerns. The program was funded again anyway. Clarke's reaction? "It makes me sick." Even though the director is, in Clarke's words, "a fraud," the liberal elite, he says, "are more than happy to look the other way, because continued funding of black social-services agencies ensures the monolithic pattern of black votes."

"'I've never seen so much waste in my life, I was just mind-boggled by the inertia of these programs.'"

His battle against the grievance machine would seem a poor prescription for political advancement, but Clarke is hardly a conventional politician. Though he lost a bid for Milwaukee mayor in 2004, he will certainly run for office again. He is eager to speak on broader issues of personal responsibility: teen pregnancy and fatherless families, he says, are surely the most dire consequence of the 1960s counterculture. "No government program will be able to fix that until we face it in the black community," he warns.

Not one for false modesty, Clarke argues—plausibly—that President Bush should give him and other black conservatives a platform to boost their credibility and exposure. Black ministers call him furtively to express support but explain that they can't do so publicly. "People are watching what will happen to me; they want assurance that they can survive. It's going to require individuals to develop courage to buck the plantation politics, because it's not fun to be ostracized by one's own people."

Given Don Scoggins's august Republican lineage, his close involvement in the War on Poverty would have been hard to predict. Scoggins's grandfather, president of a historic black college in Richmond, was the sort of gentleman who would not dream of appearing in his own home without a coat and tie. The straight-arrow grandson, head of the ROTC at Virginia's Hampton University in the 1960s, admired Republicans' support for personal investment and wealth creation. But the optimism of the 1960s civil rights era inspired Scoggins to seek an M.A. in urban planning, which landed him a job as a community-development planner for the District of Columbia in 1972. "That's when my real education began," he notes dryly.

The 59-year-old, with the courtly manner of the southern black gentry, shrinks from criticizing others. But when it comes to misguided social schemes, his polite restraint loosens. Scoggins's Washington, D.C., development office gave out grants to bring District houses up to code. Without accountability, the renovation contractors did shoddy work and fleeced the government. "I've never seen so much waste in my life," he recalls. "I was just mind-boggled by the inertia of these programs." Yet blacks look to them as guaranteed employment, he laments. Equally unaccountable, the D.C. government "was throwing money at problems hand over fist," Scoggins marvels. "The more problems the bureaucrats found, the more money they got."

Disgusted, Scoggins resigned in 1978 and became a residential landlord in the District. Again, he had high hopes for doing good. Though other middle-class blacks were moving out, Scoggins stayed put, determined to be a pillar of the community. Nevertheless, he ended up a typical slum landlord, paralyzed by local rent regulations. Tenants would fight his every effort to collect rent in housing court. In response to their trumped-up complaints, city officials would come to inspect his property and would inevitably find some housing-code infraction. Judgment: the tenants stay rent-free. "I got to the point where I didn't want to spend money doing anything, because it was all going down the drain."

JAY PAUL

Then the crack epidemic hit, further debasing Washington's black neighborhoods. A dealer assaulted Scoggins in one of his own buildings. Landlords could rent their property only by entering the federal government's noxious Section 8 housing voucher program. This was the last straw. "If your tenants are on Section 8, you're on Section 8, too," Scoggins realized. He had become a welfare recipient. He sold his properties and got out of the real-estate business.

Scoggins's experiences with government intervention confirmed his political heritage. At age ten, he had helped his family campaign for Eisenhower in the 1956 election, carrying the basket from which they sold chicken sandwiches up and down Tulsa's historic black business district. "You had every last thing you wanted there. Welfare was not even thought of," Scoggins says. Businessmen represented the black community, not a "bunch of ministers or poverty pimps, like today," Scoggins recalls.

But once the government started its anti-poverty crusade, those viable black businesses were doomed. "A private housing provider can't compete with the government. Socialism destroyed the black community. We went where the money was, and that was in the welfare state."

Scoggins's recipe for black advancement? "Someone should pool the great minds and figure out how to get blacks back into the private sector." Right now, he says, a market-based society almost doesn't exist in the black community. "Everything is Section 8, welfare, and make-work jobs programs. I've seen other ethnic groups start out without a dime in their pocket, and they thrive."

As part of his own contribution to revitalizing black entrepreneurship, Scoggins labors tirelessly to bring blacks into the Republican Party. He says with his usual diplomacy: "If I had one complaint—and I don't want to call it a complaint—the party is not working fast enough to get us into the hierarchy." So Scoggins decided, "If it's going to be, it's up to me." Besides working constantly on Republican campaigns, he formed the Frederick Douglass Republican Forum in Virginia's Fairfax County in 2003 to bring conservative speakers to black audiences. He regularly communicates with the handful of other local black Republican clubs across the country and predicts that younger middle-class blacks will be increasingly skeptical about government social programs: "They'll see that these programs only perpetuate the problem."

Jesse Lee Peterson is one of the more flamboyant scourges of the civil rights establishment. He holds the "National Day of Repudiation of Jesse Jackson" on Martin Luther King Day (to contrast "King's dream and Jesse's nightmare"), and he lectures on such topics as "We Shall Overcome Civil Rights Leaders." He leads a national boycott of the NAACP, listing ten reasons, including: "Absent Fathers: 70 percent of black babies are born out of wedlock. Where are the fathers, and where is the NAACP?" and "Education: 44 percent of black Americans over the age of fourteen cannot read. Calling the NAACP!"

Tact is not one of Peterson's defining traits. The sharp-chinned, goateed 55-year-old is too impatient with black stagnation to mince words, though he softens his more provocative statements with a disarming chuckle. At a recent conference on black leadership that he organized with the Heritage Foundation, Peterson fairly burst with exasperation, his eyebrows rising in a fervent exclamation point: "What is *wrong* with black folks that they let themselves be represented by" the likes of Jesse Jackson and Al Sharpton? he asked plaintively. "You have cities run by blacks—the mayor, the police chief, the city council are black; everybody and his mama, black—and I'm afraid to go out at night. Yet these cities' leaders are still able to blame white racism for their problems. Help me on this. Why don't blacks say: '*You're* in control; *do* something'? Why do black folks continue to accept" the racism excuse? Peterson answered himself: "I believe it's because black people have been brainwashed, dumbed-down, and demoralized"—above all, by the destruction of the black family. "Am I right or wrong on that?" he asked insistently.

COURTESY OF JESSE LEE PETERSON

Jesse Lee Peterson: "They said America owed us something."

Whites come in for equal rebuke. "Tell me this," he asked the Heritage panel. "Why are white folks so afraid, why do they cower down at the charge of racism?" A few minutes later he threw out, laughing: "Don't be scared, white folks!"

Peterson's nonstop attacks have not escaped the notice of the black establishment. Michael Eric Dyson, the University of Pennsylvania's tenured white-basher, perfectly summed up the victocrat reaction in a *Chicago Sun-Times* op-ed. Dyson had debated reparations with Peterson at the 2002 National Association of Black Journalists conference and concluded: "If you've ever wondered what a self-hating black man who despises black culture and worships at the altar of whiteness looks like, take a gander at the Rev. Jesse Lee Peterson."

Even some grassroots black conservatives, while rejecting Dyson's silly "self-hating" charge, find Peterson too acerbic. But he's not going to change his style, especially when "feel-your-pain" emoting has become the Democratic machine's signature attitude. He was raised on an Alabama plantation, where the laws were all against blacks, he says, but where people still had their self-respect. Work and family were fundamental; it never occurred to anyone that there was any alternative. After he moved to California as a teen, however, the welfare-industrial complex found him. He started running with a bad crowd and smoking marijuana. He learned that for his marijuana addiction, the federal government would send him a monthly Supplemental Security Income check, essentially paying him to keep using drugs. "I didn't know anything about welfare until white folks told me about it. They said America owed us something."

At the same time, Peterson was inhaling racial animosity from one of the most prominent Los Angeles black churches, the Crenshaw Christian Center. By harping constantly on racism, "the church taught me to hate the white man," Peterson recalls. His welfare and drug habits took away his self-esteem. "I just partied for years, until I realized my life had gone to hell. I was desperate to overcome." Eventually, Peterson got hold of himself and started working again ferociously.

That experience of liberal paternalism fuels his candor. "One reason the black community is so screwed up is too much government involvement. Most black folks—not all, not all, not all, not all," he quickly adds, his hands preemptively trying to tamp down what he knows will be a furious reaction—"are not suffering because of racism but because of lack of moral character."

Today, Peterson is trying to build that character in troubled boys. His Los Angeles boys' home, called the Brotherhood Organization of a New Destiny (BOND), fights the passive victim mentality of the inner city. "We show the boys how to stop blaming others and take control of their lives," he says. "White folks are not waking up at the breakfast table every morning figuring out how to keep the Negro down." BOND refuses public money. "Government programs aren't the solution to the personal-responsibility crisis," Peterson insists. "Families are."

Olgen Williams sees opportunity everywhere—this is, after all, America. "What I would love to do more of is to tell people: you can change your destiny. You can send your kids to college or turn your neighborhood around," he says.

Williams knows whereof he speaks. He returned to Indianapolis from the Vietnam War a white-hating, marijuana-smoking militant, who celebrated each urban riot as revenge on the Man. He tried LSD with hippies, and soon added heroin addiction and

No Amens for the GOP's Clergy Strategy

What do grassroots black conservative organizers think of the Republican leadership's court-the-clergy strategy for bringing blacks into the Republican Party? Not much. A political strategist for President Bush recently explained the GOP's rationale: "The minister is the No. 1 influence in the African-American community," said Matthew Dowd. The president's faith-based initiative, which directs government social-services funds to churches, has been the White House's primary—and successful—tool for bringing black ministers into its camp.

But the black conservatives with whom I spoke expressed little enthusiasm for this strategy. The black church is in some respects part of the problem, not the solution, they caution. "I'm tired of hearing 'we have to rally the black ministers,'" sighs Olgen Williams. "Quite frankly, black ministers ushered us into the welfare state in the 1960s. I'm not against what the Republicans are doing, but I wish they'd do something with black business." And the success of the faith-based initiative may be less than meets the eye, these conservatives warn. "Most of these black preachers are on board with Bush this year," acknowledges Jesse Lee Peterson. "But I'm concerned how their hearts have changed toward white America. I've had preachers tell me they're with the Republicans only because of the money."

Black preachers have been missing in action or affirmatively toxic on key social problems. They jump on the anti-cop bandwagon far more often than not. Rather than condemn black criminals, they are much more likely to protest against the police in any disputed arrest or shooting. This February, when a Los Angeles police officer fatally shot a 13-year-old car thief who had tried to run him over after a wild 3 AM chase, the Los Angeles black clergy blamed the cop. As Pastor Frank Stewart of the Zoe Christian Fellowship in Los Angeles told me, "I wouldn't doubt it if that officer said, 'I'm gonna kill this nigger.'"

Moreover, the black church has made little effort to fight the greatest problem in the black population: the collapse of marriage. Mainstream preachers have told Jesse Lee Peterson that they don't focus on illegitimacy because their members live that way. Cecil B. Murray, the most prominent minister in Los Angeles, called Peterson a troublemaker for opposing the distribution of condoms in church. "But God is self-control, not condom control," Peterson responded.

larceny to his resumé. He stole from the post office, where he worked as a clerk during the day, while dreaming up schemes to "off the pigs" with his black Muslim friends at night.

A conversion to Christianity stopped the slide. After starting a lawn-care business (which he ended after breaking both wrists by falling off a pruning ladder), he became the premier anti-crime organizer in Indianapolis's troubled Haughville district. Today, his office is plastered with the Ten Commandments, accolades from successive governors and mayors, glowing press tributes to the "Heart of Haughville," commendations from Justice Clarence Thomas and former attorney general Janet Reno, and a presidential pardon for his larceny conviction from George W. Bush.

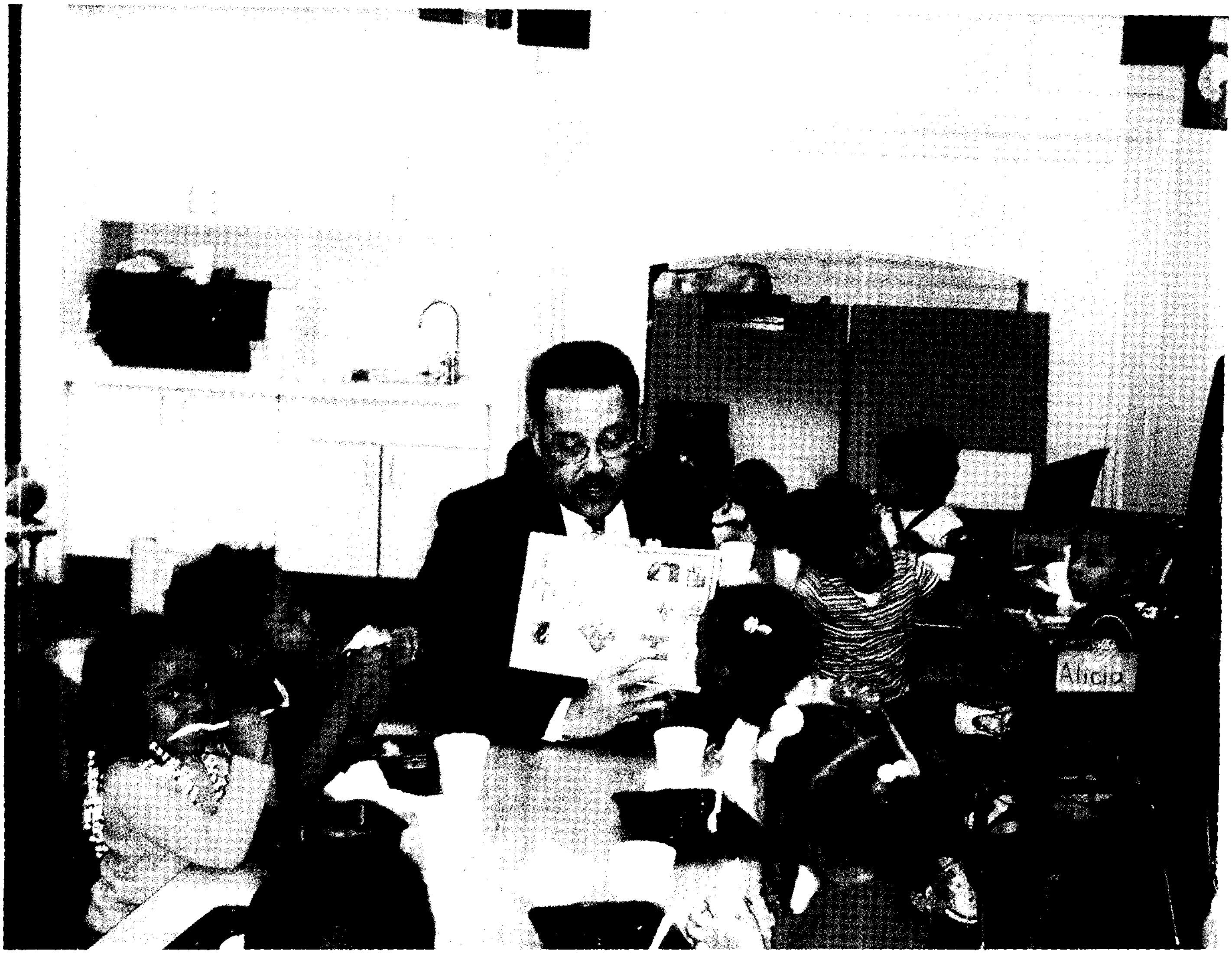
Where Jesse Lee Peterson is hot, Olgen Williams is cool and watchful. A double-chinned, slow-talking "ol' boy from Tennessee"—who, when asked about his hard-to-decipher accent, retorts evenly: "I'm not going to try to change my diction"—Williams mixes a deeply traditional Christian morality with an ironic skepticism about both left-wing and right-wing schemes for black redemption. Every important change, he believes, has to take place in the family. How can we create more people like you, who reject racial victimology? I ask. "I start in my own household. That's where the cycle has to be broken," he replies slowly. "My sons"—six of them, plus two daughters—"don't got no girlfriends. They're not laying about with every girl they see. It's about what you put in 'em. I treat their mother with respect. I don't want no

I asked Pastor Stewart of the Zion Christian Fellowship if he preaches against out-of-wedlock child-bearing in his church. "You know how I deal with it," Pastor Stewart responded. "I have a five-minute radio spot in which I talk about what blacks have to do to take responsibility for themselves. People don't come to church to hear me talk about some social message."

Yet Stewart has wholeheartedly embraced a recent effort spearheaded by a Virginia minister, Bishop Harry Jackson, to rally black preachers against gay marriage. Jackson is promoting what he calls the Black Contract with America on Moral Values, whose primary focus is opposition to gay marriage. Republican operatives are undoubtedly thanking their lucky stars for this turn of events, because the anti-gay-marriage movement has enormous potential to move black Democrats into the Republican camp. A huge proportion of the signatories at the kickoff event for the Black Contract in Los Angeles were liberal Democrats, including Pastor Stewart. Stewart may be exquisitely cautious in broaching marital childbearing, but about homosexual unions he is clarion-clear. "This black doesn't believe that gay rights and black civil rights are the same at all," he told me. "This movement is going to be a big thing. It's gonna be a big wave." Stewart says that he is being called an Uncle Tom by some blacks. "I welcome it. That's very fine, just fine."

The irony will be considerable if the movement catches on. The near-total breakdown of heterosexual marriage poses a *far* greater risk to black children than homosexual marriage. Gay marriage could be banned tomorrow, but if the out-of-wedlock birthrate among blacks continues at 70 percent, there will be absolutely no change in child outcomes. Nevertheless, if, in opposing gay marriage, ministers find themselves arguing for the value of traditional marriage for raising children, this seemingly irrelevant detour into the culture wars could have a positive effect.

It also could further weaken the traditional civil rights leadership, which overwhelmingly opposes the fight against gay marriage, despite the black public's 60 percent disapproval of gay marital unions. Eddie Huff, a real-estate agent in Tulsa and conservative blogger, argues that this conflict will lead to a greater skepticism toward conventional liberal wisdom. "Once you open yourself to one aspect of conservative ideology, more and more things make sense, especially when you start getting attacked by liberals."



Olgen Williams: "I want to stand for American values."

tattooed, dope-smoking, shacked-up athlete to be their hero."

If individuals don't have values, Williams says, social anarchy results—though, he adds, "I'm not talking about forcing morality on anyone." Instead, he has extended his moral influence into his neighborhood through example. Nineteen-year-old boys affiliated with his community-service center accompany him to local jails. They get up in front of 200 young inmates and announce: " 'Guys, I'm not fornicating. I've never smoked no cigarettes or marijuana.' " And the convicts, Williams says, break out in applause. " 'Yeah, brother, you're right,' they say."

I asked Williams how he found such boys. "They're here, all around you," he tells me. "When you give them a chance, you'd be surprised." Popular culture, however, puts them at risk, in Williams's view. For example, a recent article in *Ebony* on the top ten black couples featured only one married pair, he notes contemptuously. "I'd rather see a custodian raising his kids and sending them to college than a $1 million entertainer. What entertainer promotes the sanctity of marriage?" The Black History Month website contained just "basketball players, tattoos, dancers, and buffoonery," Williams says. "What about hardworking, blue collar people?"

Would more youth programs help foster traditional values in kids? I ask. Not a chance, at least without accountability. "We spent $7 trillion on poverty and lost that war a long time ago," he says. "I don't have no silver-bullet program," he adds with typical realism.

There is one government initiative, however, that has immediate and certain effects on urban communities: crime-fighting. Without safety, Williams says, neighborhoods collapse. "All the people with economic power will be gone; all that's left are poor people." Economic development can occur only where crime is under control, because "people spend money only where they feel safe."

To prove his theory, Williams forged an unprecedented alliance with the police in Haughville, a neighborhood previously accustomed to protesting law enforcement, not working with it. "We told the police: we want you to arrest the criminals; we've got your back. In 1995 we started kicking it hard," he says. Drug dealing and murder dropped markedly, and Indianapolis cops began requesting assignment to Haughville because of the community support. Businesses moved in, and economic activity picked up.

> "'I hate to hear how mad people get at immigrants because of their success. We're good at that, black people.'"

But getting local residents to take advantage of those new opportunities isn't easy. "We're in serious jeopardy as a people," Williams argues. Immigrants are starting businesses where the victimologists claimed that only government spending could spark economic activity. And then, rather than finding out how the new entrepreneurs did it, Williams observes, many blacks just get resentful. "I hate to hear how mad people get at immigrants because of their success. We're good at that, black people. We think government is giving immigrants something. I tell people: 'Ask them. Ask them to teach you how to run a business.' But we don't want to, because it means sacrifice."

To fight the entitlement mentality, Williams runs Christamore House, his community agency, with a radical twist: it doesn't hook people up to welfare. "There are no excuses here. I have no checks to give out. Our thing is: get a job. I don't use the term, 'McDonald's job.' Five dollars is better than zero. That's better than you coming here and asking me for a handout."

Despite Christianity's all-important role in his own life, Williams rejects the idea that religious faith is the key to urban reclamation. It is the American dream that he is fighting for. "We have greater opportunities in this country than anyplace in the world," Williams says. "Notice, I said 'opportunities,' not 'panaceas.' I want to stand for American values. I tell my kids: 'There ain't no other place to live, honey; you don't want to go there.' There's nothing wrong with saying: 'I love America, I support the American dream,' " he says. "I'm an American. I don't want to be anything else."

Many black conservatives are banking on time to bring about a more widespread change in thinking. The older generation remains wedded to what U.S. Civil Rights Commissioner Peter Kirsanow calls the "grievance-legislative model" of politics. For many who were close to segregation, America will always be racist, and only government social programs can possibly offset the effects of white prejudice. "Their mentality is frozen like Japanese soldiers in World War II in Burma, who weren't aware that the war was over," observes Los Angeles–based talk-show host Larry Elder. It's a hopeful sign that the younger generation, by contrast, is distancing itself from the previous norm on several key social issues, and that younger blacks are increasingly likely to identify themselves as conservative and moderate, according to polling done by the Democrat-aligned Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

The most hopeful sign, however, comes in the courage and eloquence of individual black conservatives who are willing to withstand hatred to defend their beliefs. They are radically committed to color-blindness and, for that reason, reject the idea that a new black leader is necessary to give legitimacy to conservative thought. "We have a 'leadership,' " argued journalist Mychal Massie at the recent Heritage Foundation conference. "He's George W. Bush."

The president would do well to take Sheriff Clarke's advice and invite these brave men over to the White House. ◆

COURTESY OF OLGEN WILLIAMS

Compassionate Conservative or Cowboy Capitalist?

The president understands that opportunity is the best poverty program.

Myron Magnet

Whatever happened to compassionate conservatism? Despite the Bush administration's focus on the war against terror, the idea didn't disappear. But as White House thinking developed, it got incorporated into a larger, more profound domestic theory. Yes, we need a safety net, the current view seems to go; but we don't need a European-style welfare state. What's called for is the traditional American opportunity society, as much a boon to the poor as to everyone else.

Implicit in compassionate conservatism was an epochal paradigm shift that is now all but explicit. Taken together, compassionate conservatism's elements added up to a sweeping rejection of liberal orthodoxy about how to help the poor, which a half-century's worth of experience had discredited. If you want to help the poor, compassionate conservatives argued, liberate them from dependency through welfare reform, free their communities from criminal anarchy through activist policing, give them the education they need to succeed in a modern economy by holding their schools accountable, and let them enjoy the rewards of work by taxing their modest wages lightly or not at all. For the worst off—those hampered by addiction or alcohol or faulty socialization—let the government pay private organizations, especially religious ones, to help. Such people need a change of heart to solve their problems, the president himself deeply believed; and while a clergyman or a therapist might help them, a bureaucrat couldn't.

In fact, a welfare-department worker might do harm even beyond providing money to fuel self-destructive behavior. Rather than understanding that an inner transformation is what such a person needs, the welfare worker might well try to convince him that his plight stems from an unjust economy, which provides him insufficient opportunity, or even purposely keeps a fraction of the population unemployed, so as to hold down the wages of those who are working. His problem thus is the result of vast, impersonal forces of which he is the victim (and doubly the victim if he is black in supposedly racist America). In other words—and this is the theory that undergirded the War on Poverty and has persisted to this day on the political Left, from Barbara Ehrenreich to John Edwards—capitalism is inherently defective and unjust, and therefore we need a welfare state to mitigate its harshness.

THE GRANGER COLLECTION, NEW YORK

The miracle of American exceptionalism

President Bush entered the White House with no patience for such a view, or for the psychological theory propounded by the War on Poverty's originators: that when technological change makes some workers' skills obsolete, they become so depressed, demoralized, and dysfunctional that they can't take advantage of opportunity when it does appear. What Bush understood was that the War on Poverty created its own form of depression, as women long dependent on welfare became so convinced of their own inferiority and incompetence that they could hardly present themselves without trembling and stammering at job interviews or conferences with their children's teachers. And as a far worse psychological consequence, the sense of victimization and of entitlement to government support that the War on Poverty fostered created a corrosive self-pity and resentment among the children of its beneficiaries, and among their children's children, for generations. The self-pity led to drink and drugs; the resentment to crime and violence; and both together to a perpetuation of irresponsibility, dysfunction, and failure over the generations. The first-line antidote, in Bush's view, would be the intervention of a counselor, preferably faith-based.

But if there was a permanent class of poor, the cause was not a failure of capitalism but of the War on Poverty, which reinforced such self-defeating attitudes. Clearly, as the administration understood, American capitalism was a dynamo of job creation and opportunity. Bush's generation, after all, had seen the astonishing restructuring of U.S. industry in the 1980s, when, in response to foreign competition, companies slimmed down, boosted productivity and quality, and kept hold of their markets and prosperity; while their laid-off workers didn't permanently succumb to paralyzing depression but instead found—or created—new jobs. Moreover, as a Texan, Bush had seen waves of Mexican immigrants flooding in to take jobs no one previously knew existed—still more evidence that there was no crisis of opportunity—while in the cities, a new wave of immigrant-run green-groceries, nail salons, construction firms, and even commercial fish farms in Bronx basements gave the lie to the failure-of-capitalism theory. And on top of all that, the overwhelming success of the 1996 welfare-reform act, which became ever clearer during Bush's first term, utterly exploded the idea that the hard-core poor were not working because of a lack of jobs. Welfare mothers crowded into the workforce; the rolls dropped by roughly half. Not only were their children not freezing to death on the streets by the thousands, as even so wise an observer as the late Senator Moynihan had predicted they would, but in fact child poverty reached its lowest point ever three years after welfare reform. Lack of opportunity? Hardly.

The War on Poverty rests on the false premise that capitalism creates a permanent class of poor, and War on Poverty attitudes have a deeply harmful effect on those entrammeled in America's current welfare state: so the second Bush term is bringing the War on Poverty—demonstrably a cataclysmic mistake—to an end. A glance at the administration's recent budget shows the ongoing dismantling of antipoverty programs: a sharp reduction in the Community Development Block Grant, the main conduit for funneling federal money to cities, whose failure and corruption Steven Malanga discusses on page 48; a reduction in HUD money for Section 8 subsidized housing vouchers, which abet the formation of dysfunctional single-parent families and destabilize struggling, respectable working-class neighborhoods, as Howard Husock has chronicled in these pages; and the shrinkage of ever-expanding Medicaid. Welfare is now temporary assistance in adversity, not a permanent way of life; and we can expect welfare reform's conditions to become even stricter when the 1996 act finally gets reauthorized. In the administration, a gestalt switch has occurred, so that what it once perceived as the background now stands out as the foreground: as White House director of strategic initiatives Peter Wehner puts it, "Government's default position should not be to view citizens as wards of the state, but rather as responsible and independent, self-sufficient and upright."

Supporters of the old paradigm are naturally apoplectic over such a transformation; and their outrage reveals just how sweeping a welfare state they really champion. As Georgetown law prof Peter Edelman, who resigned from the Clinton administration to protest the president's signing of the 1996 welfare reform, told columnist William Raspberry: "For virtually all of my adulthood, America has had a bipartisan agreement that we ought to provide some basic framework of programs and policies that provide a safety net, not just for the poor but for a large portion of the American people who need help to manage." How large a portion? Well, figures Raspberry, "the lower third of the economy."

"The second Bush administration is bringing the War on Poverty—demonstrably a cataclysmic mistake—to an end."

Think about that: nearly 100 million Americans as clients of the federal government. This is not temporary assistance but a European-style "social-democratic" (that is, socialist) welfare state. It is the political culture of America's old cities, with their hordes of government-supported clients, employees, contractors, and retirees—a culture that has produced slow or negative job and population growth. And this is exactly what the Bush administration does not want.

The failure of the European model—explicitly based on the belief that free-market capitalism is dangerous and needs to be tied down with a thousand trammels like Gulliver—is one of the signal facts of our era, along with the failure of communism. In Europe, the idea that capitalism creates a permanently jobless class has become a self-fulfilling prophecy, as strict regulation and the high taxes needed to pay lavish welfare and unemployment benefits have resulted in half the U.S. rate of job creation, twice the rate of unemployment, and thus much less opportunity. The permanently unemployed, who often go straight from school to welfare, are more sullenly alienated than any Gauloise-smoking existentialist could ever have dreamed, and no wonder: for they have no social function, except to be kept, like gerbils. They lack not just the discipline of work but the self-realization and self-respect that come from doing something productive, even if the result is only to put bread on your family's table.

Crime, hooliganism, and obscene drunkenness reign, on a scale that rivals the worst moments of the pre-reform American underclass—and that's without even mentioning the related problems in Europe's vast immigrant populations. Meanwhile retirees, often young and vigorous, go off for government-funded visits to health spas or even—as in one notorious recent German case—live in Miami at taxpayer expense. Even if this were morally sustainable, it is not economically so, as even Gerhard Schröder has learned. But with so many voters on the dole, in one way or another, or employed by the government to administer the vast welfare-state apparatus, who knows whether reform or collapse will occur first?

It's in this context that we should understand President Bush's campaign for Social Security reform. It is part of the large and coherent worldview that has evolved out of compassionate conservatism. What has always made America exceptional is limitless opportunity for everyone, at all levels—the chance to find a job, to advance up the ladder as you prove yourself, and to prosper. The poor especially have flocked to these shores for just this chance, and have proved the promise true. A giant welfare state—whether its clients are the poor, the "lower third of the economy," or a cohort of government-pensioned retirees who almost outnumber the taxpaying workers who support them—hampers the job creation that makes all this opportunity possible. Bush is determined to keep the dynamism vibrant and to encourage and empower the poor to take part in it, rather than to suggest that they are unequal to the task.

The Europeans call this "cowboy capitalism." If so, then yee-ha!

Can We Make Boys and Girls Alike?

Even if the differences are cultural, rather than biological, they are ineradicable.

Stanley Kurtz

When Lawrence Summers suggested that biology might be partially responsible for the relative rarity of female mathematics professors, he was provoking an academic giant. Powerful as the president of Harvard may be, his influence is as nothing compared with that of the behemoth that is the women's studies movement. The field of women's studies originated in the heady sixties and grew exponentially through the seventies and eighties. By the mid-nineties, when Daphne Patai and Noretta Koertge published *Professing Feminism*, their searing critique of the field, more than 600 undergraduate and several dozen graduate women's studies programs were up and running at colleges and universities across the country.

The intellectual cornerstone of women's studies is "gender," the notion that differences between men and women are not rooted in biology, as Summers had hypothesized some might be, but are cultural artifacts, inculcated by an oppressive patriarchal society. Precisely because the gender idea builds a specific (radical) political orientation into the field, Patai and Koertge point out, women's studies proved intellectually suspect from the start. You can read that radical politics right in the National Women's Studies Association constitution: "Women's Studies . . . is equipping women to transform the world to one that will be free of all oppression . . . [and is] a force which furthers the realization of feminist aims." True justice for these radical feminists means overcoming gender and establishing an androgynous society. So when Summers asserted that something besides artificial cultural roles—something besides "gender"—might account for the distinct positions of men and women in society, he was undermining the intellectual and political foundation of the entire women's studies establishment.

The alternatives to feminist orthodoxy don't end with Summers-style invocations of biology as destiny. Take psychiatrist Leonard Sax's new book, *Why Gender Matters: What Parents and Teachers Need to Know*

JERRY COOKE/CORBIS

In their drive for equality, Israeli kibbutzniks raised children in communal nurseries.

About the Emerging Science of Sex Differences, for example. Sax begins by arguing that variations in how boys and girls learn result from brain biology. But, unlike many believers in hardwired sex differences, he goes on to argue that we can triumph over biology through single-sex education. If we teach boys and girls separately and in sync with their biologically based learning styles, he claims, they will perform equally well in all academics, including math.

There's also a fourth possible view on the relations between sex and success—one that no one has systematically articulated to date. If those who assert biological differences between the sexes disagree about whether we can overcome them, the same might apply to those who assert the power of cultural differences. Even if we do provisionally hold that virtually all differences between men and women are cultural, might it not also be true that those differences are impossible to overcome? If so, it wouldn't be "gender" but the feminist effort to eliminate it that is truly oppressive. This fourth view suggests that the very same cultural forces that make feminists desire androgyny may actually prevent us from achieving it. The cultural sources of "gender" difference, properly understood, would then inform us not that our gender identities are infinitely malleable but that they're effectively impossible to change.

Sociologists have thought long and hard about the cultural "reproduction of society"—the transmission of deeply held cultural attitudes across the generations. Some social thinkers focus on the conscious transmission of cultural messages through religion and custom, while others highlight the influence of deeper social structures, such as economic organization or family forms. The most sophisticated feminist theories of gender—those that offer the most plausible alternatives to biological explanations—take the latter view. To explain the reproduction of gender differences, they zero in on family structure, especially during the first months and years of life, to a time when the way we care for children is far more important than the words we speak.

A case in point is the work of psychoanalytic sociologist Nancy Chodorow, a women's studies pioneer who gives flesh to a radically "cultural constructivist" idea of gender. Nearly every feminist plan for engineering a new, androgynous society—from the "egalitarian feminism" of political theorist Susan Okin to the "difference feminism" of developmental psychologist Carol Gilligan—offers a variation on Chodorow's themes, so it's worth considering them closely.

Chodorow hypothesizes that the differences between the sexes simply derive from the contingent circumstance that women happen to be the primary caretakers of children. The special, "feminine" empathy required for rearing children, she suggests, becomes indelibly associated in our minds with people who just physically happen to be female. Identifying with their daughters, moreover, mothers tend to stay tightly connected with them for years, drawing them into a circle of mutual dependence and empathy that is the essence of femininity. So it's not television ads or Barbie dolls that turn little girls into caring women, who themselves want to be mothers. It's the emotional closeness of mothers and daughters that perpetuates the conventional female sexual role for generation after generation.

Boys learn their gender lessons early, too, Chodorow maintains. Since traditional mothers assume that boys are different from girls, early on they tend to encourage their sons to be independent. As mothers begin to push their sons out of the warm circle of empathy, boys get the message that people with Daddy's kind of body should act differently from the way Mommy acts. If they want to be men, boys learn, they've got to overcome the qualities of emotional empathy of people like Mom. Masculinity thus finds its ground in a rejection of "feminine" qualities.

If we could just break the association between gender and child care, thinks Chodorow—if men as well as women could "mother" children—then we might vanquish gender. Men and women would still have a few distinct body parts, of course, but "masculine" and "feminine" personality differences would no longer have anything to do with bodily equipment. No one would assume that only people with a certain kind of body should be caring and empathic. The speed with which a child became independent would no longer depend on whether it was male or female. A new era would dawn.

Yet even if this understanding of gender as learned behavior is right, androgyny proponents quickly run into a problem. As Chodorow herself underscores, mothering by women produces women who themselves want to be mothers. The mechanism at work may be social and psychological, rather than biological, but it's no less real for that. How, then, do you get women to mother less and men to mother more, especially when, according to Chodorow, everything in a typical male's early rearing makes him wrong for the job?

> **"The very same cultural forces that make feminists desire androgyny may actually prevent us from achieving it."**

Plato faced this dilemma when he drew up history's first great plan for a perfectly just society in the *Republic*—a society that required, among other things, androgyny. His solution: send the members of the old, imperfect city into exile, so that the new, just city could be built from scratch. Otherwise, their recalcitrant mental habits would sabotage the creation of the new order. The fact is, attempts to force a society out of its most deeply held cultural values can be every bit as tyrannical as schemes to override our biological nature.

But what if a society actually existed—not just a theoretical utopia—whose inhabitants yearned for androgyny? What if a society existed whose citizens, motivated by a burning passion for perfect justice, committed themselves to a total reorganization of the traditional family system, with the express purpose of eliminating gender? Such a society *has* existed, of course: the early Israeli kibbutz movement. The movement wasn't just a precursor to modern feminism, it's important to add. The kibbutzniks were utopian socialists who wanted to construct a society where the ideal of "from each according to his ability, to each according to his needs" would govern the production and distribution of goods. It was as part of this larger socialist vision that the kibbutzniks set out to wipe away gender.

Kibbutz parents agreed to see their own children only two hours a day, and for the remaining 22 hours to surrender them to the collective, which would raise them androgynously (trying more to "masculinize" women than "feminize" men). Boys and girls would henceforth do the same kind of work and wear the same kind of clothes. Girls would learn to be soldiers, just like boys. Signs of "bourgeois" femininity—makeup, say—would now be taboo. As if they had stepped out of Plato's *Republic,* the children would dress and undress together and even use the same showers.

The experiment collapsed within a generation, and a traditional family and gender system reasserted itself. Why? Those who believe in hardwired natural differences obviously would say that cultural conditioning couldn't remove the sexes' genetic programming. Indeed, in his now-infamous conference remarks, Lawrence Summers invoked the history of the kibbutz movement to help make his case that biology might partially explain sex roles.

Feminists, though, say that the kibbutz experiment didn't get a fair chance. However committed to gender justice the kibbutzniks might have been, they were all traditional Europeans by upbringing. Somehow they must have transmitted the old cultural messages about gender to the children. Perhaps, too, those messages came from the larger Israeli society, from which it was impossible to shelter the boys and girls entirely. What's more—and Chodorow would doubtless emphasize this fact—the kibbutz child-care nurses were all women. A 50/50 male-female mix might have done the trick.

Yet American androgyny proponents rarely refer to the kibbutz experiment—for understandable

reasons. Its failure—even if you accept their own cultural explanation for it—puts a serious damper on the idea of androgynizing America. In the U.S., after all, there's nothing remotely approaching the level of commitment to surmounting gender found among the early kibbutzniks. If androgyny proved unattainable in a small socialist society whose citizens self-selected for radical feminist convictions, how could one bring it about in contemporary America, where most people don't want it? It would take a massive amount of coercion—unacceptable in any democracy—to get us even to the point where the kibbutzniks were when they *failed* to build a post-gender society.

“Kibbutz mothers who hoped to treat everyone the same also wanted to express their individuality by molding their kids.”

The best account of the experiment's breakdown, offered by anthropologist Melford Spiro in his books *Gender and Culture* and *Children of the Kibbutz*, points out an even bigger obstacle to androgyny. Ultimately, Spiro argues, the kibbutzniks didn't succeed because the mothers wanted their kids back. They wanted to take care of their young children in the old-fashioned way, themselves. Two hours a day with their kids wasn't enough. Even among the kibbutz founders, Spiro notes, women often agonized over the sacrifice of maternal pleasure that their egalitarian ideology demanded. He quotes from one mother's autobiography: "Is it right to make the child return for the night to the children's home, to say goodnight to it and send it back to sleep among the fifteen or twenty others? This parting from the child before sleep is so unjust!" Such feelings persisted and intensified, until collective pressure forced the kibbutz to let parents spend extra time with their kids.

Spiro holds that a pre-cultural form of maternal instinct subverted the kibbutz's child-rearing approach. But a plausible cultural explanation is even more devastating to feminist hopes for a gender-free America. What really defeated androgyny on the kibbutz, this interpretation posits, was the profound tension built in to the very culture of modern democratic individualism that the kibbutzniks embraced—the tension between liberty and equality. As part of their insistence on their unique individuality, the kibbutzniks recognized the unabridgeable unique individuality of everyone else. Hence, their insistence on radical equality. Full equality meant that everyone had to treat everyone else the same way. Even the differences between my children and the neighbors' kids would have to go. They pretended that their children belonged to the collective—"child of the kibbutz," they would say, not "my child."

But the other side of democratic individualism is the idea that each of us is *uniquely* individual. And inseparable from this individualism are certain aspirations—to express yourself personally, and to treat yourself, your possessions, and your family differently from how you treat everyone else. Child rearing doesn't escape these aspirations. In fact, in modern societies people pay far greater attention to the unique characters of their children than people do in traditional, group-oriented societies. Lavishing intense, personal attention on their kids is a favorite way for modern individuals to exercise personal liberty.

Kibbutz mothers who hoped to treat everyone the same thus also wanted to express their individual characters by molding their own kids. The two goals—reflecting the two sides of modern democratic individualism—were finally incommensurable. Eventually, the desire for personal expression trumped the quest for radical equality. The parents decided to raise their own kids in their own way. No one ever got the chance to find out if further tinkering might have eliminated their children's gender differences.

Kibbutz children slept in common dormitories, not at home.

CORNELL CAPA PHOTO BY ROBERT CAPA/MAGNUM PHOTOS

The culture of democratic individualism characterizes contemporary America, too, of course, and it still cuts two ways. Feminists insist on radical equality, and androgyny is the logical outcome of that drive for equality. Yet at the same time, especially since the baby boomers came on the scene, many American women have treated the experience of motherhood as an exercise in self-expression—indeed, they do so more fervently than the kibbutzniks.

A modern, self-expressive, committed-to-full-equality American mother might know that her child is getting quality care from a relative, a nanny, or a nursery, but she'll often feel dissatisfied, since the care isn't *hers*. Part of the point of being a parent, she'll feel, is to express one's unique personality through how one cares for and shapes one's children. In practical terms, she'll be reluctant to give up her kids long enough to break the cycle of "gender reproduction."

True, the last 40 years have seen tremendous changes in the social roles of men and women—changes that could never have happened were there not significant flexibility in gender roles. From the standpoint of feminism's ideal of androgyny, though, the shift is still very partial. Until the link between women and child rearing completely breaks down, neither corporate boardrooms nor Harvard professorships of mathematics will see numerical parity between men and women. In the meantime, in disproportionate numbers, at critical points in their careers, women will continue to choose mothering over professional work.

From either a biological or cultural point of view, then, the feminist project of androgyny is ultimately doomed. But that doesn't mean that it can't do harm in the meantime. In America, many boys are slipping behind in school; their sisters are significantly more likely to go on to college. Yet thanks largely to the influence of academic feminists, legal and educational resources still flow disproportionately to supposedly victimized girls. In the end, gender won't disappear, whatever the mavens of women's studies hope, but the careers of some bright young men probably will. ◆

LEONARD FREED/MAGNUM PHOTOS

Androgynous child rearing, kibbutzniks believed, *was the key to equality.*

America's Worst Urban Program

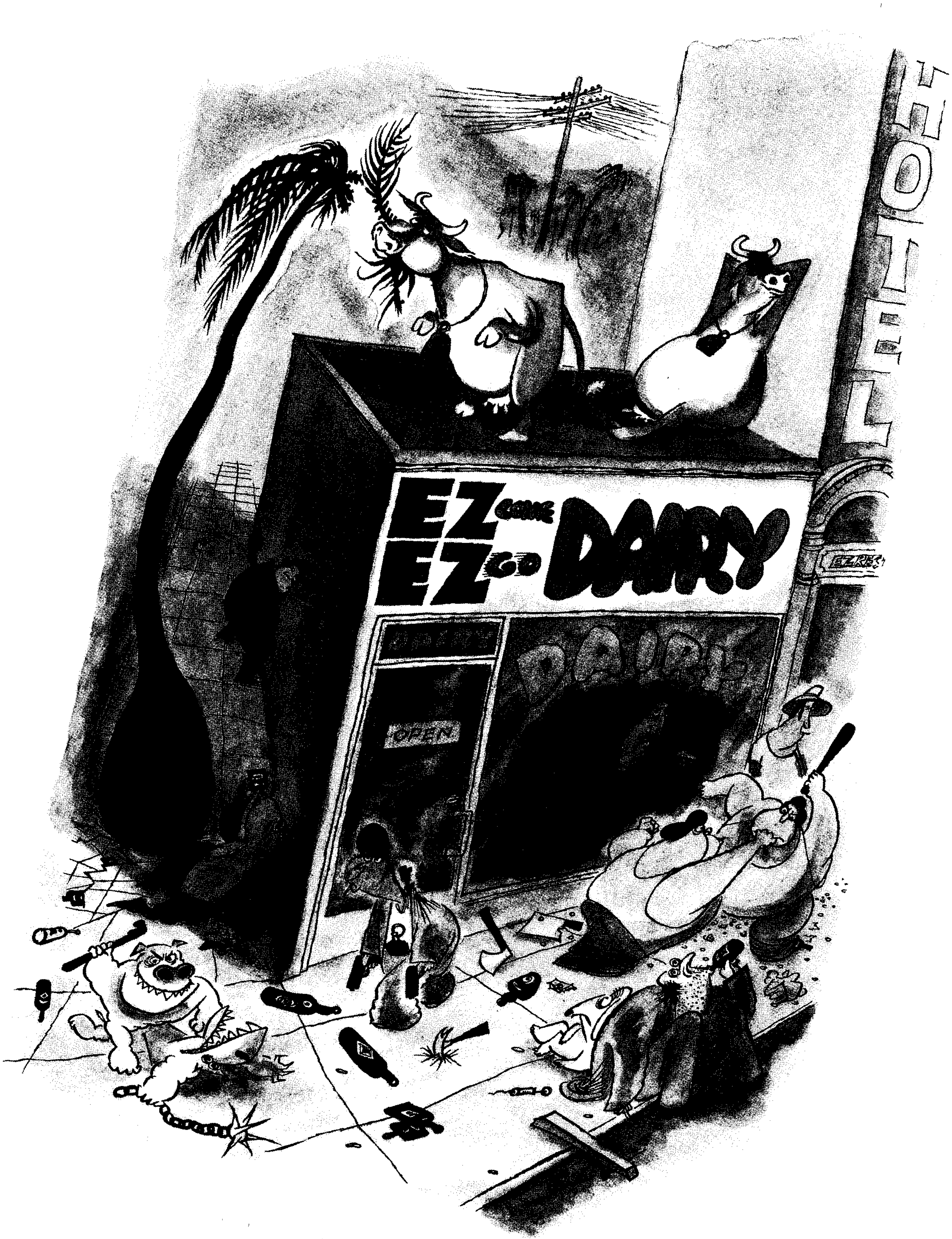
The Bush administration is right to put the community-development block grant out of its misery.

Steven Malanga

In its new budget, the Bush administration is proposing to eliminate one of the last and least effective vestiges of the War on Poverty: aid to cities doled out in the form of community-development block grants. The president has proposed slashing funding for this $5 billion-a-year boondoggle, which allows local officials virtually a free hand in spending federal money in their cities. Bush would fold what remains of the block-grant program into other, more tightly focused and controlled grant schemes.

The end cannot come soon enough. Over the last 30 years, the block-grant program has expended some $100 billion in thousands of communities, with little to show for the effort. Local officials squandered the billions by financing unworkable projects that often went bust, investing in new businesses that couldn't survive in depressed neighborhoods, and funding social programs with little idea of how they might actually strengthen their communities. A paradigmatic example of government ineffectiveness, this tempting pot of money gradually evolved into nothing more than a funder of local patronage and congressional pork spending. By killing the program, the Bush administration will do more than just save billions of taxpayer dollars. It will send a message that cities must cast off the 1960s dependency mentality that viewed federally subsidized programs as the only road to inner-city community revival and economic development—a notion that years of failed efforts should now put to rest.

Illustrations by Arnold Roth


HOTEL
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Created in response to the riots of the mid-1960s, urban-aid programs sprang from a belief of those radicalized years that the economic decline of inner cities resulted from external forces unconnected to the cities' own high-tax, antibusiness policies or the growing culture of inner-city dependency, nurtured by a vast expansion of welfare. Instead, such model-cities gurus as Edward M. Kaitz and Herbert Harvey Hyman, in their *Urban Planning for Social Welfare*, blamed urban decline on, among other things, federally subsidized home mortgages, which they argued encouraged the middle class to abandon the cities, and also on the nation's Protestant ethic, which directed private charitable institutions to target their aid only at the "worthy poor" who embraced our culture's values, but skimped on aid to those who didn't.

To counteract the sins of the federal government and of our bourgeois culture, federal officials proposed spending immense sums to rebuild neighborhoods, stimulate local economies, and finance social services that could restore the sense of community evaporating from inner-city neighborhoods as poverty demoralized their residents. President Johnson grandly asserted that with this investment, the federal government would help create "cities of spacious beauty and living promise," while the director of his Office of Economic Opportunity, Sargent Shriver, confidently predicted that the government could all but eliminate poverty in a decade. Buoyed by such optimistic self-assurance, Washington crafted a panoply of urban-aid programs and eventually rolled them into one gigantic block grant, funneling billions of dollars of urban aid to local public officials, many of whom understood little about the true causes of urban decline or about how the economies of cities and neighborhoods worked.

A graphic illustration of how little this money accomplished is the failure of the program's key initiative: a loan scheme designed to stimulate business in poor neighborhoods. War on Poverty planners had argued that poverty persisted in distressed areas partly because banks and other businesses redlined them, starving them of the investment they needed to revive by refusing to do business there. To counteract that lack of capital, the block-grant program poured hundreds of millions of dollars into businesses in poor communities, often financing companies that had difficulty repaying their debts, backing projects that went bust, and rarely creating jobs in the distressed areas at which they were targeted. Nationwide, nearly 25 percent of block-grant-backed loans wind up in default, according to a recent analysis of dozens of community-lending portfolios. Even worse, a second HUD program—known as Section 108—which allows block-grant communities to raise money for loans by floating HUD-backed notes, has a staggering 59 percent default rate. Although government programs are expected to make riskier bets than private banks (whose loan-default rates are typically in the low single digits), the stratospheric failure rate of HUD loans amounts to a squandering of millions of taxpayer dollars, since taxpayers are on the hook for these loan guarantees.

When it comes to such lending programs, the bigger the effort, the worse the failure. In Los Angeles after the 1992 riots, for instance, the federal government plowed a staggering $430 million into a loan program designed to finance a cornucopia of jobs in East, South, and Central Los Angeles but that went bust after creating pitifully few jobs. The federally sponsored Los Angeles Community Development Bank (LACDB) searched out worthy businesses in depressed areas, but since its crime-ridden target area remained an economically inhospitable place, the bank had trouble finding companies to lend to. Criticized for not making loans quickly enough, it then started pouring money unwisely into local businesses.

It made one of its biggest loans to a former welfare recipient who had become a successful soft-drink salesman and wanted to open the country's first minority-owned dairy. Turned down by every commercial lender he approached because the venture was so risky, the salesman, Kevin Copeland, won a $6 million loan from LACDB. Then the troubles began. The company racked up big losses, and, as the red ink spread, LACDB replaced Copeland and poured more money into the operation to keep it alive, until the bank had invested $24 million—violating its own lending limit. Even that wasn't enough to salvage the dairy, which closed only 18 months after then–vice president Al Gore touted it in a speech as a major success story of government-backed lending.

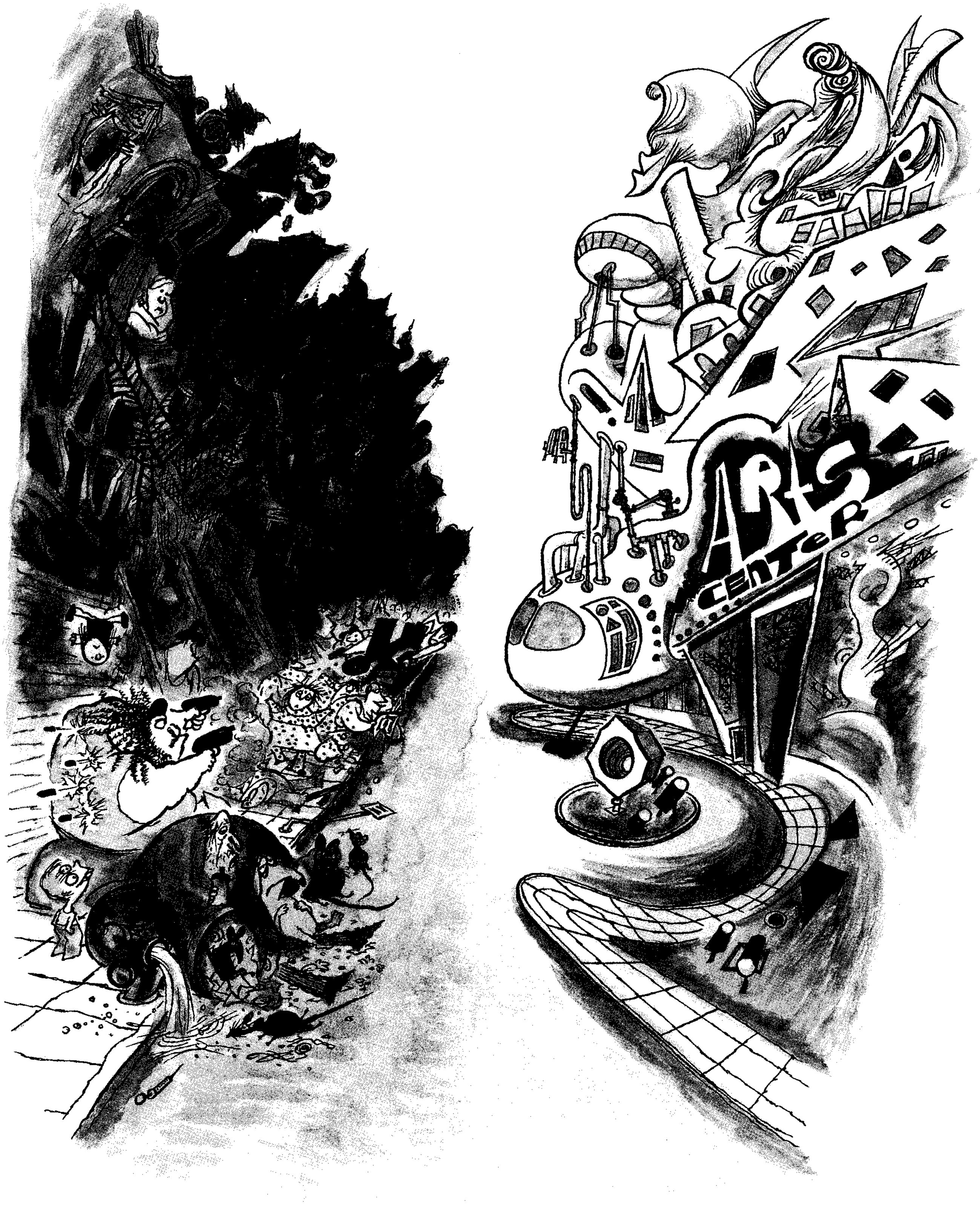
Copeland's dairy was far from LACDB's only failure. Just two years after the bank started making loans, nearly one-third of the companies in its portfolio had gone out of business or were delinquent in their payments—more than triple the default rate that the program had planned for. A HUD audit found that more than two-thirds of the 150 companies that received assistance did not create the required number of jobs in the enterprise zone where the bank operated, and that only 11 percent of the jobs generated went to the zone's residents, for whom they were intended. Last year, in response to the audit, the Los Angeles City Council shut down the program, supposedly a national model for lending in troubled areas.

A structural flaw in such programs is that they are not designed to make a profit, and that those who run them are investing the federal government's money, not their own. As a result, these institutions are often carelessly and ineptly administered. A HUD audit found that in 30 percent of loans, local lending administrators didn't collect enough information to verify the job-growth objectives that were the very point of the program. And when the city auditor of Syracuse, a former private-sector banker, recently scrutinized the city's community-development loan program, he found not only that 60 percent of the loans were overdue, but was also stunned to learn that the program had no written lending criteria or standards for evaluating the viability of projects and companies, even though it had been pouring out money for years. The auditor, Philip LaTessa, said of his findings, "If this were the private sector, very possibly we would be in bankruptcy."

"The stratospheric failure rate of HUD loans amounts to a squandering of millions of taxpayer dollars."

Urban aid can do little in cities whose own policies are hostile to real economic development, a key reason that the block-grant program has wasted so much money. Like Los Angeles, Buffalo has received huge infusions of federal urban aid—more than half a billion dollars in community-development block-grant money alone in 30 years. If this kind of urban aid truly worked, Buffalo would be a shining star in the economic-development constellation because it has gotten more block-grant money per capita than any other U.S. city. But as a recent series in the *Buffalo News* revealed, the city has almost nothing to show for its massive federal aid, having squandered it on a succession of failed projects. It poured nearly $60 million into trying to revive its theater district, with numerous loans and grants to private businesses that then defaulted, including hotels, restaurants, and arcades. Elsewhere in the city, government lent money to a developer to create a trade center near a Canadian border crossing, but it went bust. Various office-tower and hotel projects have also failed. More than $23 million of the nearly $38 million lent by the city through the Section 108 loan program alone has gone bad.

These projects failed because Buffalo offers little foundation for success, despite the boost from federal aid. The city, once a great manufacturing center, began to decline in the 1960s, when, just as it was facing intense competition from other regions and from foreign goods, New York State officials began sharply raising taxes to pay for an expanding social agenda. The state also introduced new mandates, like requiring municipalities to pay a portion of the state Medicaid bill, which forced up property taxes, too. First businesses, then residents, began fleeing, and today Buffalo ranks as one of the nation's most depressed cities. The state and city have continued on this ruinous course. New York has, according to the Tax Foundation, the second-worst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tax climate for businesses among the states; its workers' compensation system is the third most expensive for employers, nullifying Buffalo's continuing efforts to reinvigorate its industrial base. And despite 50 years of population loss, Buffalo has the highest state and local tax burden of any metropolitan area in the country.

A similar waste of federal money has occurred in cities around the country that were equally inhospitable to business and so squandered funds on doomed projects. For 20 years, starting in the mid-1970s, two blighted Baltimore neighborhoods—Park Heights and Upton—received some $100 million in federal aid, but by the mid-1990s they were "much worse off today than they were" at the start of the federal programs, according to an economic-development consultant who studied them. Over that time, in fact, Baltimore's economy shrank by 55,000 jobs, while the city poured much of its block-grant money into recreational centers and street improvements that had little impact on the economy but were designed, according to a study by a local foundation, to placate community activists' demands for programs.

> **“These projects often reflect what politicians believe the market *should* want, rather than what it really wants.”**

Conceived at a time when federal officials argued that communities should have wide latitude in deciding how to spend federal aid, the block-grant program has given local politicians a free hand in choosing what to invest in. Naturally, they have pumped big sums into their favorite projects, many having nothing to do with revitalizing depressed neighborhoods. Too often, these projects reflect what politicians believe the market *should* want, rather than what it really wants.

Governments, for instance, have used block grants to finance a building boom in convention centers and subsidized hotels that the private sector won't fund—a building boom that has yielded a nationwide glut of space, as cities have vied with one another for a largely flat business. Starting in the 1980s, cities of all sizes, from Washington, D.C., and Jacksonville, Florida, to St. Louis, Tulsa, and Orem, Utah, have used block-grant money to fuel this boom, despite mounting evidence that the business was becoming saturated. "While the supply of exhibit space in the United States has expanded steadily, the demand . . . has actually plummeted," according to a recent study by urban-planning expert Heywood Sanders of the University of Texas at San Antonio.

The building boom has sparked little, if any, economic development. The Washington, D.C., convention center, built with $834 million of public money, is attracting no more business than the city's previous, smaller center. Similarly, St. Louis's new Renaissance convention hotel, built with block-grant and other public money and touted as the final piece of a downtown renewal project, has been running at an occupancy rate below 50 percent, and rating agencies have put its government-backed bonds on credit watch.

Whatever economic development that block-grant money actually produces in a given locality almost always comes at the expense of somebody else, since communities now use federal urban aid to give businesses relocation incentives—in effect employing U.S. tax dollars to wage war against one another for existing jobs rather than creating new ones. Maryland, for instance, used block-grant money to buy land for a distribution center for Wal-Mart, the world's largest company and one of its most profitable. Rhode Island and Delaware were also wooing the company to open the center on their turf. Similarly, Florida gave Sears, which Wal-Mart replaced as America's largest retailer, a $5 million loan backed by community development block-grant money, in order to keep the retailer from moving a distribution center to Georgia.

The early designers of urban-aid programs saw inner-city decay as more than just an economic matter. Poor neighborhoods were losing not only jobs but also their sense of community, advocates for the poor argued, and therefore, as the original block-grant legislation said, the government should help create "viable urban communities" by setting aside money for social services, from senior-citizen centers and youth sports leagues to mortgage-counseling services and AIDS-prevention efforts. But the notion of "community development" was so vague—if not downright specious—that it has been hard to measure the effectiveness of programs that fall under that rubric, and in most cases government stopped trying long ago. Billions of community-development block-grant dollars have cascaded into social programs with little sense of how the money has been spent and whether it has helped achieve the program's original goal.

Occasional audits of these groups suggest that much of it has gone to ineffective and inefficient programs, often run by politically connected operators. An analysis of Buffalo, for instance, which has spent about $75 million of community-development block-grant money over the last three decades on social services, found that, over one three-year period, 13 neighborhood housing groups helped initiate an average of only about two mortgages or home-repair loans per month each, nearly half of which were for $5,000 or less. Yet the groups collectively received about $1 million in annual funding and continued receiving it despite their poor performance.

If there are social services that demonstrably do good, municipalities have certainly not figured out how to target their block-grant spending to them in a way that achieves community-wide goals. After the 1992 riots in Los Angeles, for instance, Congress told the city and county that they could spend $14 million a year more on social programs aimed at "the underlying causes of the unrest"—as if everyone knew what they were. But the city and county largely just funneled the additional grant money into the existing array of senior centers, graffiti-removal programs, AIDS-prevention education, and so on. Little wonder that, according to a subsequent General Accounting Office (GAO) study, authorities could never "quantify how much public service funding was spent on the specific results or causes" of the riots, much less on whether that spending did anything to cure those problems. And little wonder that the federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) has criticized the entire block-grant program for lacking the means to measure the output or effectiveness of many of its grantees.

However wrong the War on Poverty planners turned out to be, they at least operated under the notion, misguided but sincere, that their programs might do some genuine good. But as time passed, local officials and Congress have twisted the block-grant program for their own self-interested ends. They have allowed billions to go to politically connected groups, to congressional pork spending, and to wealthy communities—a far cry from the original intention of using the money to revive depressed neighborhoods.

Buffalo Common Council member Joseph Golombek Jr., a critic of his city's block-grant efforts, calls local politicians "pigs feeding at the trough" of the program, and recent headlines from around the country make clear how widespread the problem is. In New London, Connecticut, for example, block-grant money funded an adult-education program run by the mayor's brother. In Yonkers, New York, the local chamber of commerce used a community-development block grant to run a program that employed a political ally of the mayor; when the mayor began feuding with the head of the chamber and withdrew the block grant, the chamber ended the program and fired the mayor's ally. In Buffalo, a council member successfully sought block grants for a literacy program run by her son-in-law and for an AIDS-prevention organization that she founded and that employed her daughter. That is par for the course in Buffalo, where numerous developers and community groups receive block-grant funding, though their performance is never evaluated, says Golombek. "The people who run them and staff them write out checks for politicians and staff their campaigns," he says, "and they expect a payback."

In treating the program as a patronage tool, local officials are, of course, following the example of Congress. The less effective the program has turned out to be at reversing inner-city decline, the more congressmen have hijacked it for their own pork-barrel spending. Each year the HUD appropriations bill contains hundreds of member "earmarks," spending that is not part of the regular HUD grant-making process but instead is inserted by individual congressmen directly into federal legislation. These earmarks, totaling between $250 million and $300 million annually, have nothing to do with curing urban decay. An investigation by HUD's general counsel in the late 1980s disclosed that members of Congress were using the program for such pet projects as sugarcane mills in Hawaii and a recreation center on Mackinac Island, a tony Michigan resort boasting a Grand Hotel and restored Victorian homes—about as far from urban decay as one can get in America.

“Municipalities free of urban blight have used federal money to build tennis courts and to finance arts centers.”

A few years later, President Clinton's transition team issued a blistering report that warned of the "systematic plunder of many millions of taxpayer dollars" in block grants and other HUD programs. It hasn't stopped: in the last several years, congressmen have lavished over $2 million in grants on zoos, $340,000 for opera houses in Connecticut, Michigan, and Washington State, money for the Southern New Mexico Fair and Rodeo, the Alabama Quail Trail, and the Iao Theater in Wailuku, Hawaii. In election years, the block-grant program becomes a particularly valuable political piñata. In the 2002 elections, for instance, U.S. Senate Democrats, trying to protect their slim majority, inserted $31 million in block-grant earmarks into HUD legislation for states with close races—a 50 percent increase over the previous year in those states.

Little wonder, then, that politicians like Senator Charles Schumer, now head of the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee, ignore the manifold failings of the program, amply detailed in studies by everyone from the GAO to the HUD Office of Inspector General, and insist that block grants are the "seed corn for urban development and job growth" and "the single most important tool that cities like New York have to grow," statements so at odds with the facts that they are simply ludicrous.

One of the most corrosive consequences of the War on Poverty is that it created an entitlement culture among the poor that soon spread to politicians representing them and then, over the years, to pols representing the wealthy and the middle class, too. This entitlement mentality has thoroughly infected the block-grant program. Soon after it began, mayors of thriving cities and congressional representatives from posh districts began complaining about their exclusion from the program. To win their support, the Carter administration expanded urban aid to include "non-distressed" communities. As a result, thousands of municipalities free of urban blight have used federal money to build tennis courts in tennis-playing neighborhoods, to finance arts centers, or to pretty up their downtown shopping districts. The town of Parkland, Florida, where family income is more than twice the national average, has used block-grant money to spiff up its local community center. Bergen County, New Jersey, where annual household income is 55 percent above the national average, spent nearly $280,000 in block-grant money over a three-year period to keep alive a privately owned local theater and arts center less than half an hour from Broadway. The town of Lower Merion, Pennsylvania, where household income is more than double the national average, has spent some of its block-grant money to compile a history of a local train station.

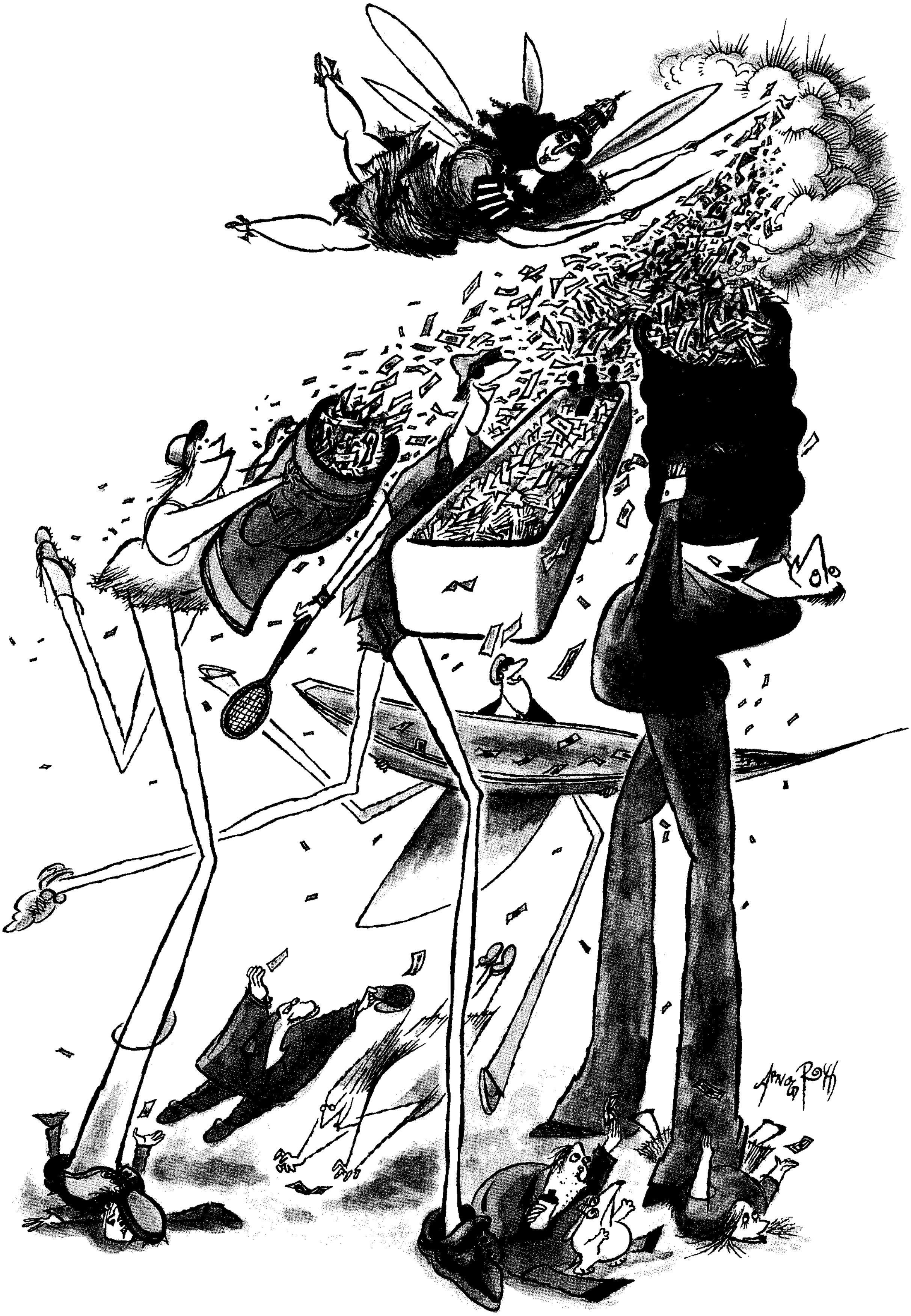
Some wealthy cities, like Greenwich, Connecticut, and Newton, Massachusetts, defend the program by pointing out that they, too, have some lower-income residents and that their programs focus on these few. But the original legislation intended to provide federal aid not to poor people everywhere but to the poor in cash-strapped cities whose budgets were under strain. By contrast, these wealthy communities have enormous tax bases and robust city budgets that could pay for services to the poor without help from the feds. Greenwich's tax base is so healthy, for instance, that the town's school system spends about $18,000 per pupil annually—about twice the national average—yet Washington is contributing hundreds of thousands of dollars a year to finance social programs there. Similarly, when state aid to cities declined in Massachusetts during the last recession, residents of Newton simply voted to raise their taxes by $11 million rather than cut any services. But taxpayers across the country are paying for the wealthy town's block-grant programs. "Block grants have helped spur a redistribution of income from moderate communities to some privileged rich ones," says National Taxpayers Union vice president Pete Sepp.

Given the awful track record of this program, the Bush administration now aims to cut and reform it. The Office of Management and Budget recommends excising billions that now go to well-off neighborhoods, and vastly reducing spending on social-services programs. The administration wants to give what will be left of the block-grant program to the Commerce Department and focus it on one purpose only—helping to boost distressed neighborhoods. And considering how poorly even these efforts have often turned out, OMB is demanding that projects receiving funds demonstrate their effectiveness using such traditional measures as increases in jobs, gains in property values, or declines in neighborhood crime. Cities will have to compete with one another to win such aid, rather than receiving funds each year based on a preordained formula.

The administration is sure to face a tough fight, for the program is now so large and diffuse that everyone from congressmen in wealthy districts to urban politicians defends it. Over the years, this coalition has saved the program and resisted even modest changes, because its supporters view it as an entitlement—free money to plug their budget deficits and finance city-employee salaries. New York, for instance, uses a portion of its block grant to pay the salaries of city building inspectors and lawyers in its housing department. Buffalo has spent some $100 million of its block-grant money over 30 years on government salaries, at one point paying some 230 city-hall workers through the program. Milwaukee this year will spend about $1 million of its block-grant money on salaries in its comptroller's office and city-council staff.

Losing that windfall has prompted hyperventilation from local pols, perhaps none sillier than the response of Baltimore mayor Martin O'Malley, who compared the president's block-grant cuts to terrorist attacks on our nation's "core cities." O'Malley, recall, is mayor of a city that spent some $100 million of block-grant money on two neighborhoods that ended up worse off than ever.

If the president is serious about expanding the *opportunity society,* he must kill this program beyond resuscitation. America's great cities were once hothouses of the opportunity society that Bush hopes to nourish. They provided economic mobility that allowed tens of millions to move into the middle class and beyond, before government policies encouraged a culture of urban dependency. During the 1990s, America saw an urban revival, especially in New York—a renewal that made cities once more theaters of opportunity. Those revivals had nothing to do with federal aid and everything to do with cities' taking control of their own fortunes. In New York, for example, Mayor Rudolph Giuliani's effective war against crime, combined with tax cuts and welfare reform, lifted former welfare recipients out of poverty and sparked startling reinvigorations of places like Harlem and central Brooklyn, where previously urban planners had wasted hundreds of millions in government aid to no avail. Such revivals remind us that cities and their residents are in control of their own futures and that what stimulates renewal is not federal aid, but local governments that deliver basic services well and allow citizens to pursue their economic dreams freely.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Arnold Roth

How to Save the Subways—Before It's Too Late

Gotham's critical lifeline is a wreck.

Nicole Gelinas

As New Yorkers learned in January, when a fire in a signal-relay room knocked out service for the half-million people who ride the A and C trains daily, Gotham's subways are in deep trouble. Bad enough that the inferno showed that any bum (or terrorist) with a lighter could paralyze New York; worse still was New York City Transit chief Larry Reuter's announcement that this critical lifeline for Brooklyn and Queens residents would be out for three to five years. When transit officials responded to riders' outrage by getting most service up and running within two weeks, public relief mingled with anxiety that transit brass didn't understand how their system worked or that they were responsible for keeping it going, no matter what.

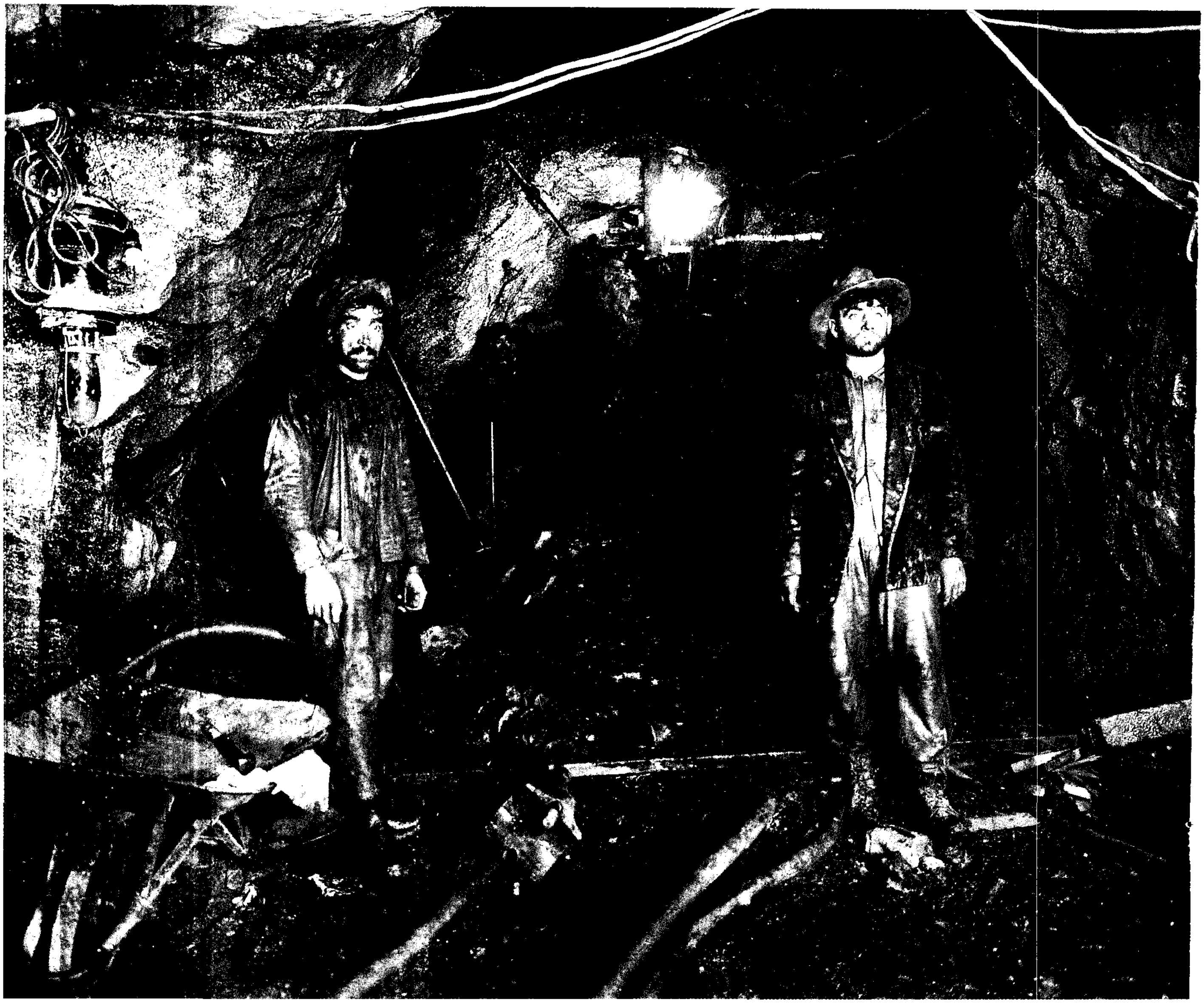
Perhaps most troubling of all was the revelation that this essential element of the region's economy depends on fragile technology that predates the Great Depression. And further, though all this equipment desperately needs updating, the Metropolitan Transportation Authority (MTA), the state agency that runs New York City Transit and the region's commuter trains, doesn't have the money to replace it or even maintain it properly, and will have even less wherewithal for vital infrastructure investments over the coming decade. The MTA faces bills now coming due for decades' worth of poor operational and financial management—for which not just the bloated and clueless MTA but also Governor Pataki's political leadership are ultimately to blame.

Below all these ills lies a still more fundamental problem, also the fruit of politics. State and local pols ensure that the price of a subway ride falls far short of the actual cost, but refuse to make up the difference with reliable subsidies. Meanwhile, the political clout of the Transport Workers Union (TWU) ensures that that cost is outrageous, thanks to lavish labor contracts and pension benefits. So the MTA, squeezed from both the cost and the revenue sides, runs chronic operating deficits that are about to become unsustainable.

Here's why the numbers will never add up. The MTA will rake in $3.5 billion in mass-transit fares this year, plus $1.1 billion from its bridge-and-tunnel tolls. That $4.6 billion covers less than half the agency's $9.4 billion in expenses. Correspondingly, the $2.8 billion in fares that 1.4 billion subway riders will pay this year is

The Third Avenue El, 1947

ELLIOTT ERWITT/MAGNUM PHOTOS



Building the IRT a century ago

barely half of what it costs to run the trains. So dedicated taxes must provide a $2 billion dump into the MTA's coffers each year. State and city subsidies add another $600 million, along with the bridge-and-tunnel profits. And it's still not enough.

So the MTA has increasingly turned to debt, and looming interest costs will soon widen today's huge operating gaps and constrict capital investment for decades. The 12 percent of revenues (and subsidies) that the MTA must spend this year on interest will rise to 21 percent by 2008 and 24 percent within a decade, while city and state subsidies remain flat and fare revenues creep up by single digits. This is a blueprint for physical asset deterioration—and for a serious breach of safety.

The MTA and Pataki claim that debt is rising because the agency *had* to borrow to revitalize assets that were sorely neglected during the 1960s and 1970s budget crunches, when tracks deteriorated and graffiti-caked trains rusted. That was certainly true for the 1980s, when then–MTA chairman Richard Ravitch floated billions in bonds to fund dramatic improvements that attracted millions of new customers—increasing the fare base (theoretically) to repay the debt. But it is not true today, when each year's new debt increasingly finances the predictable costs of keeping the aging system in good repair. Prudent public finance, by contrast, would reserve debt for the major construction projects that bring in new revenues, like the Number 7 subway extension, or for major asset upgrades that cut labor costs or improve operating efficiencies, like MetroCard vending machines and modern signaling systems. Compounding the problem, whereas Ravitch financed only a third of his infrastructure spending with debt, and the rest with dedicated taxes and public subsidies, the proportions are almost reversed in current MTA chairman Peter Kalikow's $20.3 billion capital plan for 2000 through 2004, 61 percent financed with long-term bonds.

Worse, like a shopaholic who consolidates his heavy credit-card balances into one new card with an introductory low interest rate, in 2002 the MTA restructured existing debt to save $220 million in interest a year until 2015. But then the real cost of the boondoggle kicks in: $8.6 billion in *extra* debt payments during the decade following 2015. "The MTA mortgaged the future," judges Preston Niblack of New York City's Independent Budget Office. When the outstanding debt is retired in 2031, some of the assets those bonds have paid for will have long since rusted away. Now Governor Pataki wants to engineer an even riskier variation on this feat, letting the MTA float bonds and invest the proceeds in the stock market, gambling that its investment gains would exceed the interest rate on the debt.

> **"The MTA has had scant success in pushing transit workers to boost their productivity in exchange for raises."**

But even without this new round of Pataki-style financial roulette, the MTA has already crippled itself for the next 30 years. It wants to make $27.8 billion in capital investments between 2005 and 2009—including $10 billion for new projects. But nobody has a clue where most of that money will come from. The Wall Street bond-rating agencies have quietly told MTA finance officials that the agency can't raise much more than $4 billion in new borrowing over the rest of the decade. The feds, as always, will pony up about $5 billion. The balance is a yawning gap.

All that debt is just a symptom of the real problem. The MTA can't rationally budget its capital spending without first paring back its out-of-control operational costs—because new revenues now would just go to fund waste. As it is, the $6.2 billion needed to pay the MTA's 55,000 workers covered under 62 separate contracts will exceed fare and toll income by nearly $1.7 billion, or 35 percent, this year, and so will chew up a chunk of the dedicated taxes and subsidies originally earmarked for capital, not operational, spending.

The Transport Workers Union opposes any real cost-cutting efforts, such as a plan to restructure all above-ground rail operations into a single new subsidiary, and all bus operations into another—a consolidation that could save $210 million over three years. Why the resistance? The new bus division would have the authority to cut civil-service protections for new employees—who would still have their union security, of course, but transit workers are accustomed to two layers of insulation from management.

The one modest consolidation that Kalikow did get labor to accept carried a stiff condition that means it will save only millions instead of tens of millions, as the MTA had first hoped. In 2002, bus lines in Brooklyn and the Bronx—formerly private lines that the MTA had purchased decades ago—were merged with the rest of the MTA bus operations. Until then, these lines operated as separate units, so that a mechanic from a Brooklyn depot could not repair a Bronx bus that had belonged to a private company decades previously, even if the bus had broken down across the street from the Brooklyn depot. But when the TWU accepted the consolidation, the MTA had to give legacy employees of the formerly discrete bus units full MTA benefits, including 12 days of sick leave each year instead of five.

The MTA has had scant success in pushing transit workers to boost their productivity in exchange for raises. Three years ago, Kalikow

BROWN BROTHERS

got the TWU to accept a few basic efficiency provisions—not enough to cover the cost of the raises, and nowhere near the cost-saving labor flexibility he wanted, which would have required workers who clean stations to perform extra duties, like removing graffiti and changing lightbulbs, as they clean.

Meanwhile, the agency's heavy health-care costs for these same employees, $873 million this year, or 9 percent of the MTA's budget, are expected to balloon to $1.15 billion by 2008. These costs include a new prescription-drug benefit for NYCT retirees who aren't yet old enough to qualify for Medicare. "Local 100 may be the only union in the U.S. that can claim health benefit improvements this year," union leadership exulted in 2002. And there are plenty of retirees, since most NYCT employees can quit working after only 25 years of service at a lavish pension of 50 percent of their average last two years' pay. Switching to a system of 401(k)s, as most private-sector employers have, would cut these swollen costs and would give workers an incentive to stay on the job for more than 25 years to increase personal savings.

The MTA not only has trouble managing its own workers; it's not very good at managing itself, either. A motley collection of legacy agencies—New York City Transit, the Long Island Rail Road, and the Metro-North Railroad are a few—that were all shoved together in 1968, the MTA has never rationalized its own management structure and is inefficient even by public-sector standards. Each legacy agency retains its own payroll bureaucracy, its own procurement and contracting system, and its own human-resources department, a duplicative arrangement that costs $709 million a year. As New York State Comptroller Alan Hevesi has carefully documented, the authority employs 698 people in human resources, 443 in legal services (while spending an additional $10 million on outside counsel), 166 in labor relations, 359 in accounting, and 444 in customer relations and marketing. It pays 262 people just to answer customer queries by telephone. But even though billion-dollar operating-budget deficits loom indefinitely, the MTA

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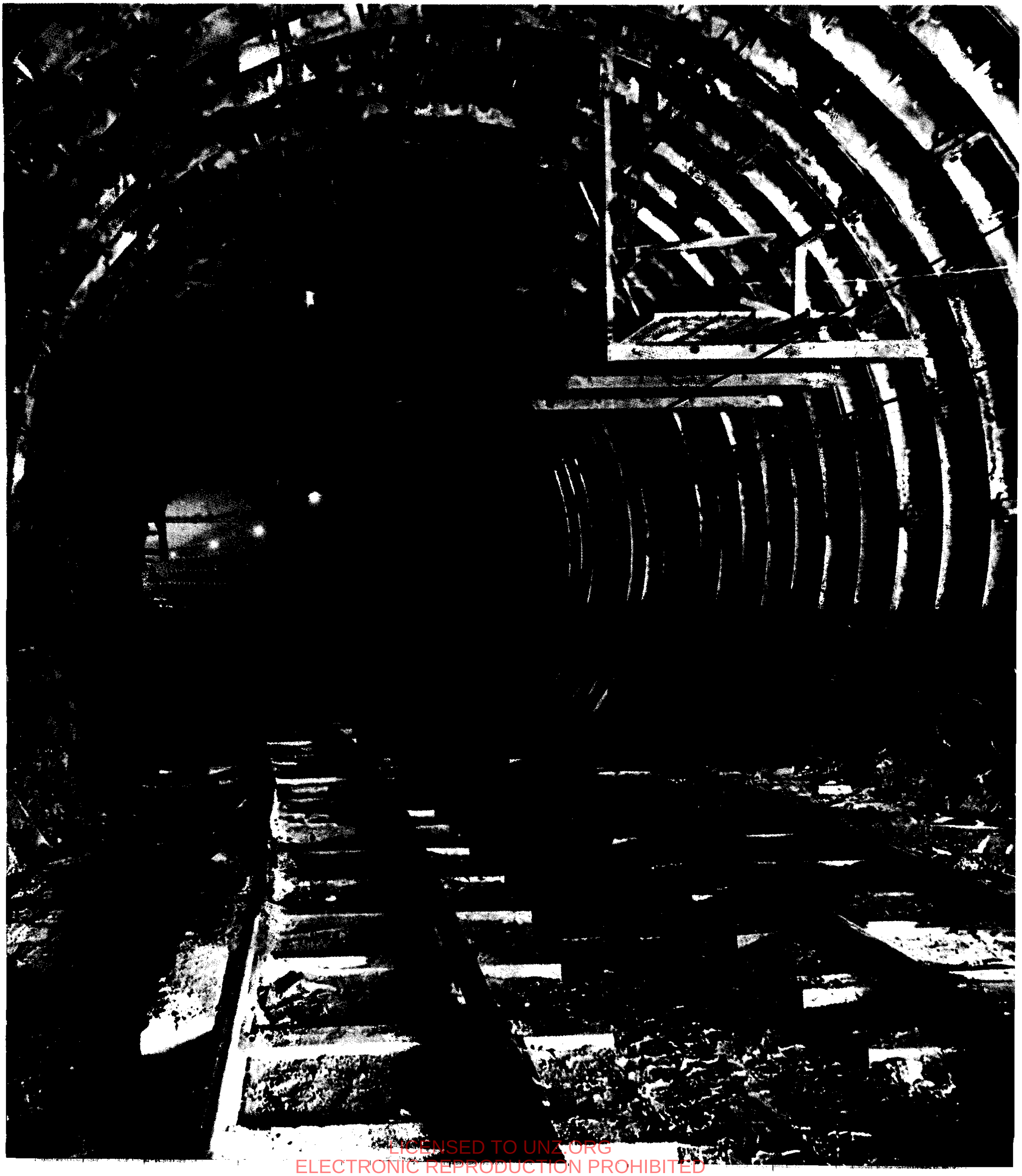
The IRT's South Tunnel under construction



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A ladies-only subway car in 1913

has proposed to cut just 15 of these jobs; the agency would rather cut corners by deferring regular maintenance at Grand Central Terminal.

So it has come to this: New Yorkers pay job-killing taxes to fund a $105 billion state budget and a $50 billion city budget each year—but they can't expect a decent municipally funded and municipally planned mass-transit system. The MTA is already scrapping plans to buy new subway cars and buses, and will put several major station-upgrade projects on hold. State and city officials are jettisoning plans to expand the system: Mayor Bloomberg told state legislators in January that the planned new line down Manhattan's Second Avenue from Harlem to Wall Street—on and off for 65 years—may be off again. The only new project assured of financing is the one that city taxpayers must fully fund out-of-pocket: Bloomberg's plan to extend the Number 7 train from Times Square to revitalize Manhattan's Far West Side.

Ongoing projects are all a day late or a dollar short, or both. New York City Transit's signal-replacement project will be completed three years later than planned; the rehabilitation of substations, tunnel lighting, and fan plants is nine years behind schedule. The MTA's renovation of offices at 2 Broadway is an egregious example of poor project management, years late and costing $499 million—$300 million more than originally estimated (and $845 million after interest costs). And why did MTA bigwigs spare no expense on a gleaming office building while track and signal projects languish for lack of funds?

This isn't an abstract crisis. Transit woes affect real lives, constrict Gotham's tax base, and retard economic growth. New York's most beautiful outer-borough neighborhoods have a harder time competing with Westchester and New Jersey for affluent residents when straphangers must endure brutal commutes. Middle-class residents of Brooklyn neighborhoods like Gravesend and Brighton Beach, for example, must endure an hour-and-a-half-long ride on the F Train (the second-busiest line) to travel just 13 miles to midtown, because the express tracks that run down the middle of the line have been dormant for decades. Thirty years ago, the trip took 40 to 45 minutes.

For customers in Brooklyn, Queens, and the Bronx, that long subway ride is the worst part of the day, and the worst part of the city. Faced with an hour-long commute on Metro-North versus an hour-long commute on the subway, hounded by panhandlers, many taxpayers will choose the former—and the city's tax base suffers. Burdensome commutes are also partly why Manhattan's real-estate prices are so high: every minute not spent crawling along on the train is worth hundreds of extra dollars a month in rent.

> **“Mass transit woes affect real lives, constrict Gotham's tax base, and retard economic growth.”**

The dysfunctional state of the MTA grows out of decades of municipal wrongheadedness. In 1904, when Gotham's first subway opened for business, the fare was one nickel—a market price set by city leaders and private investors so that subway operators could make an operational profit every year. In 1948—after two wars, the Great Depression, and triple-digit inflation—the fare was still one nickel. Successive city politicians, convinced that mass transit was a human right, not a private good to be traded in the marketplace, had transformed the nickel fare from a measure of economic value to a symbol of Gotham's status as savior of the poor. New York's pioneering, for-profit subway builders and operators could no longer make an operating profit, the public sector stepped in, and the subway system's woes became permanent.

The city's business and political leaders had the right idea when they launched a commission in the 1890s to get a subway built. The private sector, they understood, had been running railroads and elevated train lines successfully for decades, and they were not about to get the government into that complicated business. Instead, the public sector set general policy goals, drew up proposed subway routes, and set the reasonable regulated fare to prevent monopoly pricing. The city provided the initial bonds to finance the huge, risky project, but once the system was built, the private sector was on its own. It had to manage its costs so as to pay the city a rent that would cover the interest on the debt, to buy subway cars and signal systems, and to make a profit from the fares collected.

An Irish-American contractor backed by financier August Belmont won the auction to build, equip, and operate the subway over a 50-year franchise. Belmont's West Side IRT from lower Manhattan to the Bronx opened in 1904 to rave reviews and ran at one-third above its capacity within four years, notes Clifton Hood in his history of New York's subway, *722 Miles*. Until the end of World War I, the IRT was “a gold mine,” Hood reports, with operating profits as high as 20 percent, and regular 15 percent dividends for shareholders. Service was excellent, with proud proprietor Belmont personally responding to customer complaints.

Within a decade, New York political and business leaders knew that Gotham needed more subway lines. Getting them built set the stage for trouble.

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City planners wanted to auction the rights to a new private-sector operator for its proposed subway expansion, to avoid giving Belmont a monopoly over Gotham's underground transit. But Belmont didn't want anyone else stealing his customers and diluting his profits. And those profits gave him the political and financial clout to discourage competitors. While stalling politicians so that they couldn't put out more proposed subway lines for bid, he bought outer-borough rail companies outright, so that they couldn't bid on proposed new Manhattan lines. The *New York Evening Post* spoke for the city when it branded the Belmont monopoly "a new engine of political power . . . an entrenched and indolent monopoly."

A second problem arose. Urban planners wanted to build subways that would extend far into rural areas of the Bronx, Brooklyn, and Queens, to encourage development and get workers out of crowded Manhattan slums. But planners and would-be subway operators thought that residential development could take decades—meaning that private-sector operators wouldn't be immediately assured of a return on their investments. Early operations on such a large scale were thus too risky for the private sector to assume alone.

To solve that problem, New York encouraged the IRT to bid on some of the new lines by putting up more than half of the construction capital from municipal coffers and by guaranteeing that the IRT could take its pre-1911 profits before making any interest payments on its share of the new construction debt. (Of course, if the IRT didn't make enough from operations to provide its historical profits, the city wouldn't make up the shortfall.) And, providing the same share of construction capital, the city also finally signed a contract with a competitor for service to Brooklyn and Queens, far from the IRT's existing service from Manhattan to the Bronx. The IRT and the newcomer, Brooklyn Regional Transport (reorganized later as the Brooklyn Manhattan Transit Corporation, or BMT), each won 49-year franchises, and were to fund operations fully with fare revenue. Funded with municipal capital, the new subways served their public-sector purpose, promoting development of middle-class neighborhoods throughout the boroughs. With ridership that quickly surpassed expectations, they also brought in profits.

But as progressives saw how much the subways had improved the lives of working people by opening up new routes to undeveloped areas, "[t]he social function of transportation, as opposed to economic returns to private companies, [became] the primary concern," recounts Peter Derrick in his chronicle of the subway expansion, *Tunneling to the Future*. Though costs began creeping up, and post–World War I inflation eroded profits, the progressives feared that workers would remain trapped in slums if the nickel fare rose; they didn't see why the public should suffer so that the IRT and BMT shareholders could profit. Demagogic politicians also learned quickly that pledging to protect the nickel fare from predatory subway operators was a sure way to garner votes. Thus "the nickel fare began a process of disinvestment in the subways that crippled passenger service," explains Hood. Operating deficits piled up at the IRT and BMT after World War I. Subway owners cried mercy, and service deteriorated.

Nevertheless, left-wingers like 1920s mayor John Hylan believed that the subway operators were hiding huge profits and refused pleas for a fare hike. In this belief, Hylan advocated building the city's own subway, the IND, with taxpayer dollars, so that, as Hood relates, Gotham could "earn a surplus that could be used for the construction of schools, hospitals, parks and highways." (IND construction began after Hylan's term ended.) The mayor and his radical cronies, ignorant of basic economics and convinced that the nickel fare was a "property right," couldn't grasp that subway operators couldn't make a profit when the fare remained a relic of the turn of the century as costs inexorably rose. The IRT and BMT were fated to fail, as the actual cost of a ride reached 14 cents.

Mayor LaGuardia ended the private sector's misery in 1940, when the city bought the assets of the bankrupt lines. His intent was not to subsidize what he still envisioned as a self-sustaining operation—since, he declared, "public subsidies for transit would smack of financial waste and irre-

RICHARD KALVAR/MAGNUM PHOTOS

In the 1980s, the MTA heroically cleaned up its graffiti-caked cars.

sponsibility"—but rather to operate the subways more efficiently under one umbrella to save the nickel fare. He soon saw his error as deficits mounted. Three years after he left office, the fare was finally doubled.

But he had made a second expensive mistake—one that would make trouble for generations. He thought that unification of the three subways would put transit workers under normal civil-service rules, replacing their TWU protection and squelching the growing power of transit-unit boss Mike Quill, notes Brian J. Cudahy in *Under the Sidewalks of New York*. LaGuardia was half right: transit employees were happy to take on civil-service protections—but wouldn't give up the then-six-year-old TWU.

Irish-born Quill had helped to found the local Transport Workers Union in 1934—with aid from the American Communist Party, which had decided that the first step toward replacing American capitalists with public-sector owners accountable to the people was to unionize workers, who would then break the bosses with demands from inside. The New York subways seemed a fine place to start. New York progressives fell right into Quill's trap, agreeing that, as a publicly owned entity, the subway system had a moral duty to treat its employees exceptionally well and set an example for private industry. (Quill broke with the Communists in the 1940s.)

Over his 33 years at the helm, Quill molded his TWU local into the country's most powerful public-sector labor bloc. His philosophy produced ever-increasing labor costs, public subsidies, and operating deficits that resulted, two years after a crippling 1966 subway strike, in Governor Nelson Rockefeller's state takeover of the former "gold mine" of a subway system, so that the state could fund transit deficits with bridge-and-tunnel surpluses.

Quill's legacy endures. When today's TWU leaders fight the MTA, they're still carrying the banner for a whole anti-capitalist philosophy. Members see any concession not as a necessary compromise but as an unforgivable sellout to a sworn enemy. As the *New York Times* reported after the 2002 contract settlement, some workers had wanted to strike just to tell their children and grandchildren "that they fought the good fight, as did many transit workers who walked out in 1966 and 1980." Of course, under New York law, it is illegal for public-service employees to strike. But that doesn't stop the TWU from periodically forcing Gotham's taxpayers and private-sector businesses to incur millions of dollars in emergency-planning costs when the TWU threatens to break the law and strike anyway, as it threatened three years ago.

As a solution, even the most unabashed free marketeer can't now propose that the public pay "market value" for a subway ride, because the MTA has so enshrined the inefficiencies of a public monopoly into its operations that there *is* no free-market value. New York must gently ease managed competition back into the MTA's stifling monopoly. The example of London—another fiercely union town—shows it can be done.

A decade ago, London's aging Underground needed billions to stave off deterioration. But Tony Blair's Labour government wasn't about to write a blank check, recognizing, as the U.K.'s National Audit Office put it, that the Underground "was not capable of managing efficiently and effectively the investment needed to improve and modernize the Tube." After all, the system's public-sector managers had already

Next Stop: Competition?

In buying the assets of the Queens Surface Corporation's bus lines and turning them over to the MTA in January, Mayor Bloomberg has done exactly the wrong thing. Instead of engineering a government takeover of this nominally private line, the mayor should have auctioned its routes off to a truly private operator. Not only would he improve service and save taxpayers' money, but he would also begin to loosen the MTA's—and the union's—costly public-transportation stranglehold.

Don't think that Bloomberg's un-privatization proves that privatization can't work in New York. These lines are private in name only. In reality, they are protected monopolies, sheltered from the efficiency-boosting competition that is the heart of true privatization. The city's seven private bus companies haven't bid for the rights to run buses along their 82 routes in more than half a century. For over three decades, they haven't had to worry about running efficient operations; taxpayers have been covering their annual operating deficits, to the tune of $200 million a year now. Of course, the lines still find money to donate to politicians: in 2001, their owners and managers gave $112,000 to candidates citywide.

The companies have no incentive to provide good service. Worse, their workers demand government-style wages and benefits but recognize no government-style restraint on strikes; in January, employees at two companies left their customers in the lurch during one of the year's coldest weeks. For that, Bloomberg gave them what they wanted: taxpayers are funding two years' worth of raises for the workers "consistent with the pattern established by public-sector unions in New York City," the mayor affirmed to end the strike.

Bloomberg thinks that the MTA can run the private bus lines more efficiently, and, having now taken over two for the MTA, is involved in negotiations for the remaining five. But the MTA's own bus operations are the reverse of efficient. As Manhattan Institute scholar E. J. McMahon and Baruch College prof E. S. Savas detailed two years ago, the MTA's expenses are 12 percent higher per mile than those of other public bus systems. So Gotham will continue to subsidize the lines' annual losses indefinitely. In addition, city and state taxpayers may end up funding the lines' $500 million in pension liabilities.

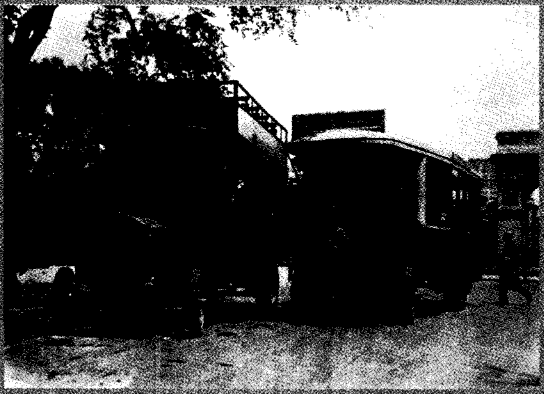
That's money down the drain. Governor Pataki or his successor should now push the MTA to inject competition into the industry. Hundreds of cities have contracted out bus routes, saving billions through private-sector management and efficient deployment of labor.

spent billions to extend the Jubilee Line 20 miles, a project that came in two years late and 50 percent over budget.

So in 1998, Blair decided to apply a dose of the profit motive. The government determined what it expected from a successful system over the next 30 years: modern signals, decent tracks, new trains, clean, modern stations—all laid out in thousands of pages of contract documents. And then officials turned to the international private sector to find consortia willing to take the risk of getting the ambitious infrastructure work done right, on time, and on budget. Four private-sector teams bid on three construction and maintenance packages in 2001; the Underground chose the winners based on the fixed-price payment that each would require from the government to do the work required. The private sector assumes the risk if its cost estimates are wrong; it gets rewarded for timeliness and penalized for lateness of completion; and, since it has assumed a 30-year responsibility, the prospect of having to redo shoddy work a few years later keeps it from cutting corners to save time now. "The government tells the private sector what it wants to achieve, not how to achieve it," explains Andrew Briggs, a lawyer who helped structure one of the contracts for the new "infracos." (The public sector retains responsibility for running the trains and staffing and policing the stations.)

The best systems work like this: the government invites each would-be operator to submit the fixed annual price that it would require to provide service along a bundle of routes for a three- to five-year period. The winning bidder earns its profit by keeping costs below that fixed price paid by the government. American cities that have contracted out bus services have saved an average of 35 percent, Savas and McMahon note—which would translate into savings of $1 billion a year for the MTA, Savas told me.

The best model for New York is London, which has contracted out all of its bus services to the private sector every three years for nearly two decades. The city's public-transportation authority sets the routes and the fares, and puts the routes out for bids. London cut per-kilometer costs by half and per-passenger costs by a third during the program's first decade.

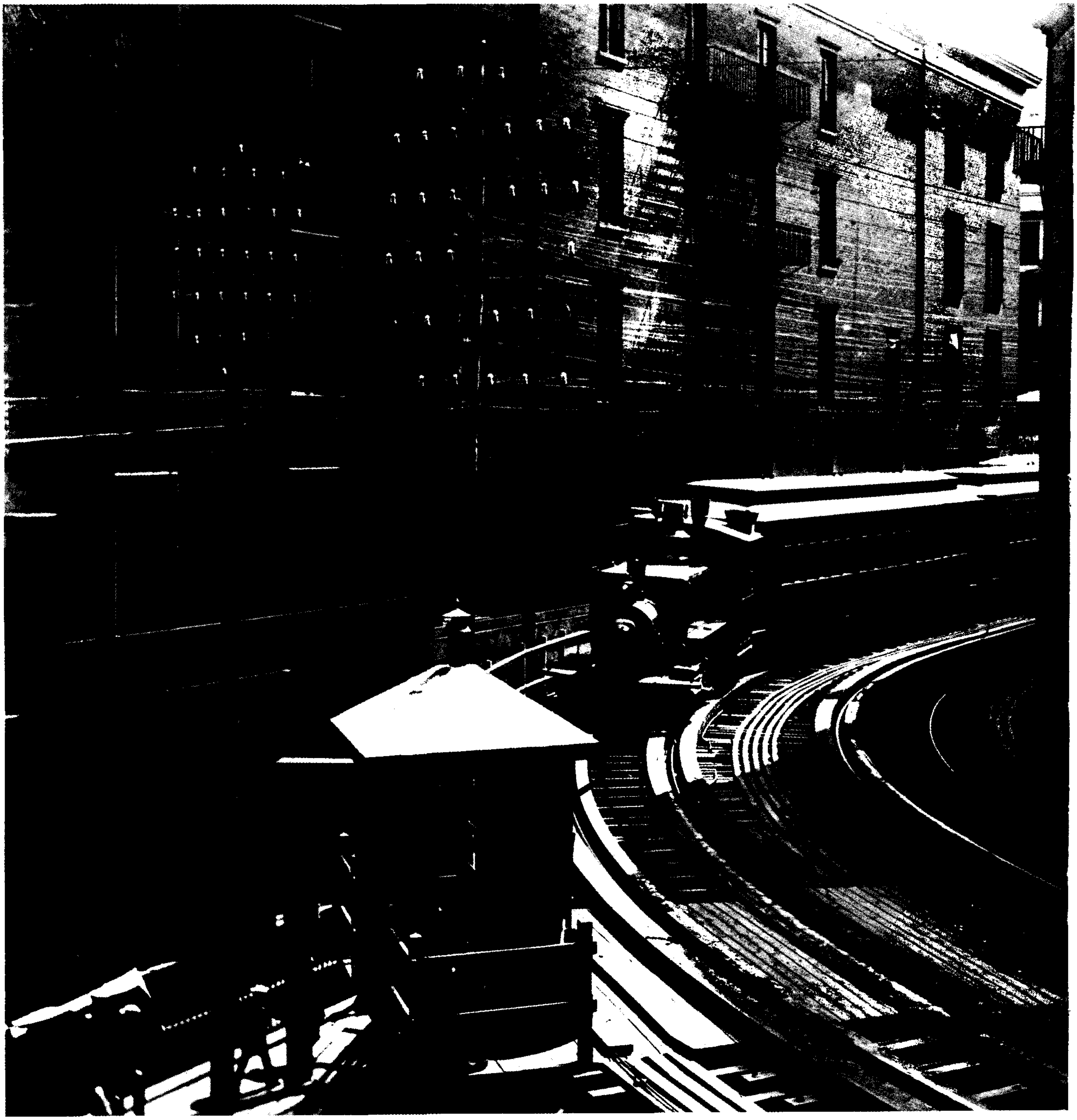


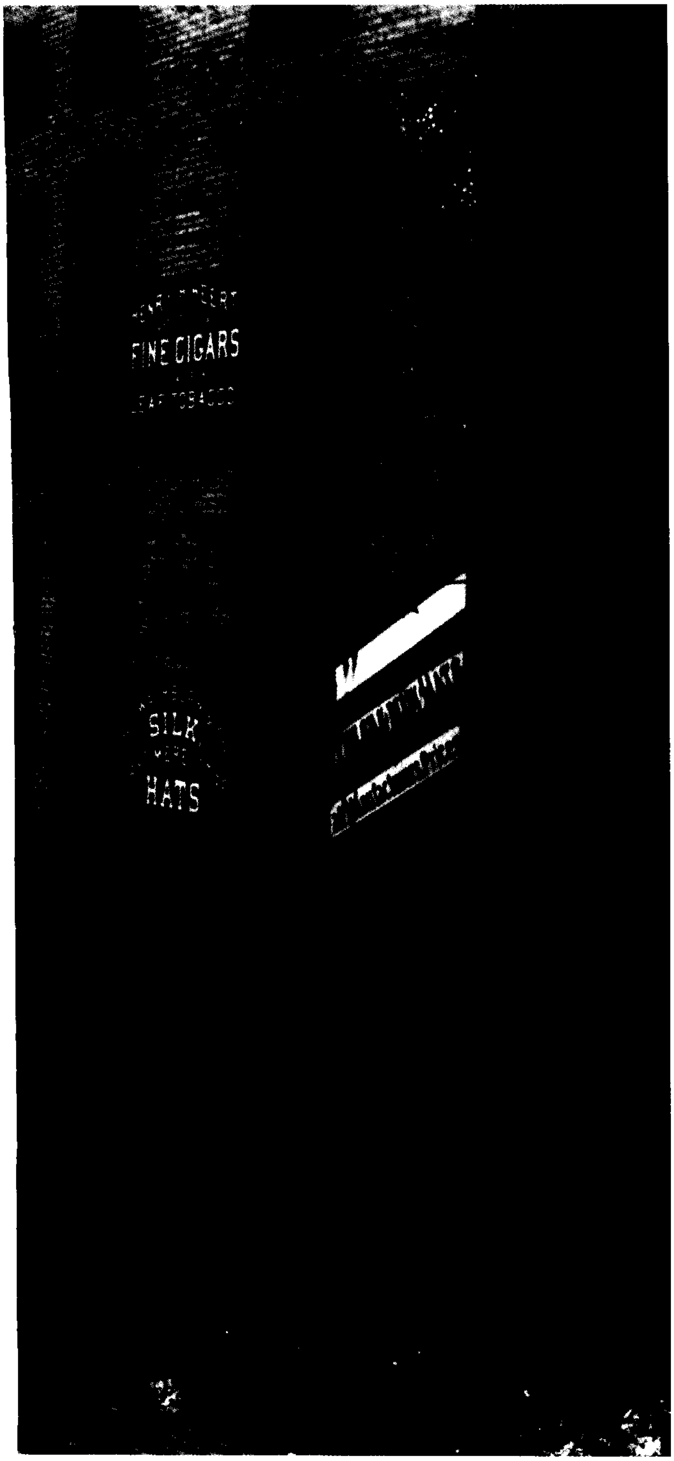
New York can do the same. To attract quality bids, the MTA should open bidding to international players, which expands the pool of candidates and cuts the risk that local companies will collude to fix bids. In Copenhagen, Savas notes, three international companies run a "magnificent system" of buses; that city has cut its bus costs by 25 percent.

The MTA must also encourage small businesses to compete. Small companies, including "dollar van" operators, could bid on routes best served by smaller buses and smaller fleets: late-night services, for example, or routes whose relatively few passengers do not justify the cost of running full-size bus fleets.

As New York reaps the cost savings of managed competition, the MTA could entice bidders to make profits on some routes directly out of fares. It could allow companies to experiment with premium fares for premium services, or with fares that vary with distance and time of day.

Offering consumers a choice? Stranger things have happened.





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The infracos offer a solution not just to the problem of infrastructure cost overruns but also to that of a monopoly labor force. When the Tube handed maintenance over to the infracos, it also moved 7,500 workers into the employ of the private companies. (13,500 workers remain at the Underground to run trains and staff stations.) The transferred workers will keep their jobs but will have to negotiate future contracts with their new private management.

"The unions were . . . fiercely opposed to the whole structure," says lawyer Tom Day, who represented Tube Lines' lenders. "It's not that they will be paid less, but that they will be forced to do more efficient work. And as time goes by, the company will need [fewer] workers. Thus, with attrition, union power will be eroded." The unions had little choice, however, knowing that if they illegally struck against Labourite Blair, they would have no sympathy from the opposition conservatives or from the public. Blair's move was like what would happen if Democratic New York Assembly speaker Sheldon Silver announced that he would work with the MTA to restructure the agency and cut labor costs across the board: the TWU would have no choice but to seem cooperative, having lost their most powerful political ally.

Adapting this model, the MTA could improve upon London's too-long and too-complex contracts by outsourcing responsibility for one discrete, long-term project at a time, rather than fobbing off responsibility for upkeep of the entire subway system onto the private sector all at once. For example, it could award a competitive contract to refurbish and maintain a set of subway stations for 20 years, based on a fixed-fee bid for investment to be pledged and services to be performed. The MTA would require its private-sector concessionaires to assume responsibility for decent work and for cost overruns, and would tie their profits to performance. Eventually, the MTA could build up a portfolio of concessions for more ambitious work—locking in costs for discrete projects for decades.

An elevated railroad, 1910

In New York, new money for transit is becoming a universal cause. But the city must ensure that new sources of revenue don't go toward the same old operating deficits and overrun-plagued projects, but rather toward achieving cost efficiencies through managed competition.

There is another way to help break the vicious cycle: hike the fares steadily, until today's average fare of $1.30 (with MetroCard discounts) reaches the actual $3–$4 cost of a ride. Fares should cover operating costs (after federal and state capital grants), just as they did in 1904, and should be indexed yearly to local and national inflation.

City and state politicians have to get over the nickel-fare mentality and stop viewing transit as a social service. Currently, every long-overdue fare increase is met with outcries about a "regressive tax." While politicians are right to worry that minimum-wage workers would not be able to afford the full cost of the fare, no other staple—food, gasoline, electricity—is priced so that the least affluent can easily afford it. The government shouldn't subsidize trains—it should subsidize people. Earners who fall below an income threshold could apply for a state- and city-funded subway voucher—and Pataki could never stiff the city on the subsidy, or the poverty police would be after him. But regular New Yorkers do not have an inalienable right to a subsidized commute—ask working-class suburbanites if the government subsidizes their auto insurance.

Treating the subway as a market service, not a social service, would also improve the prospects of long-stalled projects. Take the Second Avenue subway. Former MTA boss Ravitch doesn't think that any subway project can pay for itself through its fares—and indeed, the cruel reality of amortization dictates that the $16 billion project would require a $7–$8 fare to support its own debt. *But a crueler reality is that there's a reason* that the East Side hasn't gotten its subway after 70 years of whining about it: there's no public justification for the investment. The public sector builds subways with the sole goal of increasing tax revenues. That's why Mayor Bloomberg is happy to pay for the Number 7 train extension to the Far West Side, even though the West Side is already criss-crossed with trains: he wants new tax dollars from Far West Side development. But a new East Side subway won't encourage new development, because the East Side is already packed with people. So East Siders will likely be whining for another 65 years—unless, of course, the Second Avenue subway is built in response to market demand.

The city could invite private companies to assess the East Side market and determine if a critical mass of riders would pay a premium over the MTA fare for a ride downtown in a gleaming car with cushioned seats, say, or with guaranteed on-time express service. If so, the city could structure such a project much as it did in 1904, raising the initial capital itself and taking bids from the private sector to determine which company would carry out the construction work for a fixed price and operate the system for a regulated, premium fare. According to MTA forecasts, the Second Avenue subway would serve a minimum 500,000 customers a day. Even at a conservative $4 fare—less than the fare on today's premium Train-to-the-Plane—it's hard to believe that an international private-sector transit operator wouldn't be tempted by a project that would bring in a $600 million annual revenue stream.

Or consider new express tracks in Brooklyn. Ravitch notes that this possibility is "a good question for the market." Many Brooklyn residents pay more than $500,000 for their houses; some might be willing to pay extra to get to Manhattan in under an hour (and many already pay $5 each way to ride the express bus). But the MTA would never spend the billions needed to improve dramatically its dismal service to the outer boroughs. That's also a market need, not a public need.

None of this would be easy: the MTA, like August Belmont 100 years ago, is wary of monopoly-busters. Furthermore, the private sector is rightly leery of the political risks involved in *any* large-scale project in New York City.

But Gotham could do it right 100 years ago. Why not now?

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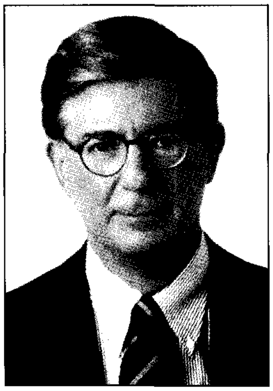

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How Not to Develop the Far West Side

Pols should get out of the free market's way.

Steven Malanga

In his State of the City address, Mayor Michael Bloomberg proclaimed development of Manhattan's Far West Side crucial to New York's economic future. The mayor should be overjoyed, therefore, about what's happened since. Buoyed by government plans to rezone and improve access to the area, developers are snapping up Far West Side sites. The area's long-dormant waterfront is slowly waking up. And the Metropolitan Transportation Authority, prompted by an unsolicited $600 million bid from Cablevision, will auction off the development rights over its 26-acre rail yard near the Jacob K. Javits Convention Center.

But far from encouraging this eruption of the free market, the businessman mayor is out to derail any development of the MTA site that competes with his plan to build a stadium there to lure the 2012 Olympics. In pushing his centrally planned vision, the mayor who was once a CEO seems to have lost faith in the free market and succumbed to New York's political culture, which reflexively favors its own idea of how the city's economy should work over the more inventive and spontaneous visions of entrepreneurs. That culture believes that it is okay for government to warehouse valuable land, to employ restrictive zoning that unreasonably limits how the free market can work, and to micromanage economic-development projects with paralyzing inefficiency. Occasionally, the free market fights back and wins, as in Times Square, where market forces overwhelmed a government plan to make the area an uninspiring office district and instead revived it as a bustling entertainment and tourism mecca.

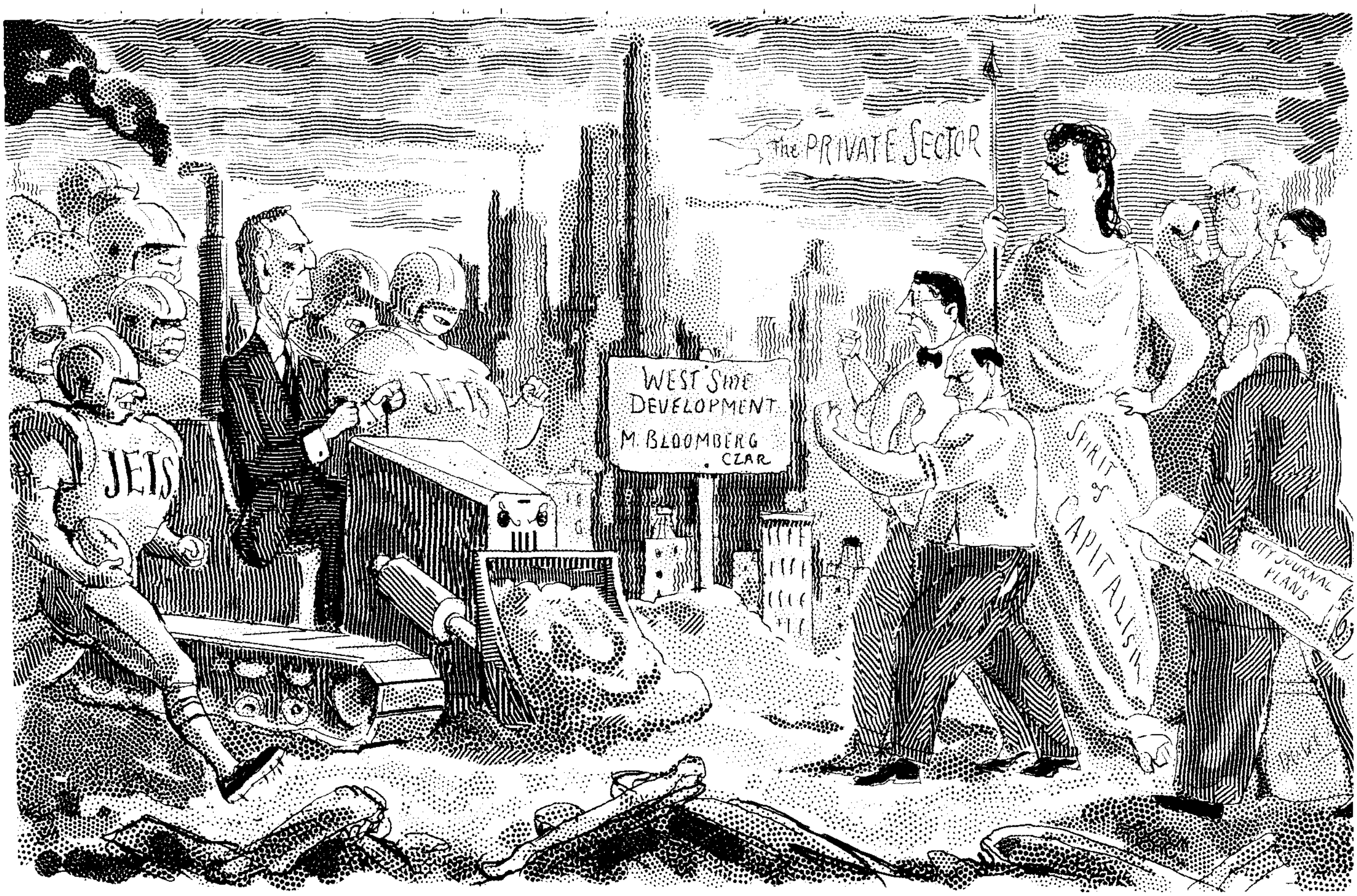
What's beginning to happen on the Far West Side is the most hopeful signal about the city's future since the 9/11 attacks. Rather than stifle or redirect it, Mayor Bloomberg and the rest of the government should get out of the way and let it blossom.

New York's political class has been trying for 30 years to spark the redevelopment of the Far West Side, with unimpressive results. Consider, for starters, the cautionary history of the Javits Center.

In 1975, when officials were making a mess of trying to replace the city's existing convention facility, the increasingly dilapidated New York Coliseum on Columbus Circle, up-and-coming developer Donald Trump proposed building a privately financed, for-profit convention center on the Far West Side. City and Port Authority officials had originally proposed a fantastic scheme for a new center on a giant platform over the Hudson River, but they dropped that project as too costly. Their next notion, to build the center in Battery Park City, similarly died, since there was then no hotel in lower Manhattan.

Perhaps to save the city from itself (and to get some publicity), the brash Mr. Trump identified a better site and proposed a modest, $110 million center. After first dismissing Trump's plan, the Port Authority then decided essentially to buy him out and do its own project on his site. It seems that Trump didn't have a grand enough vision to suit it—though he's never subsequently been accused of lacking grandiosity. Officials went on to hire a famous architect and upsize Trump's plans by a mere $270 million. Meanwhile, New York State squeezed the Port Authority out of the project and named the Urban Development Corporation (UDC), previously a developer of subsidized housing under a recently defunct

ELLIOT BANFIELD



Mayor Bloomberg's Olympics obsession hinders rather than helps.

federal program, as the builder and operator of the new convention center.

What happened next demonstrates why government likes to elbow aside the private sector: to keep the patronage power that comes with such enormous undertakings. The reborn UDC handed out Javits contracts to politically connected businesses and politically powerful, mobbed-up unions. Construction was rife with Mafia influence, bid rigging, and costly delays. Mafia chieftain Fat Tony Salerno, for instance, got the concrete contract and overcharged by about $10 million. In the end, Trump's original $110 million project cost $430 million. With the state still in control, the mob moved from building the center to running it, and for more than a decade the Javits Center had the reputation as the most expensive, frustrating, and corrupt facility in the country.

Meanwhile, across America other cities were rushing to build or expand their convention centers, completing more than 200 projects in the 1980s and 1990s despite a growing glut of space. The result has been catastrophic. Since the late 1990s, the U.S. convention business has declined 40 percent. Cities that spent hundreds of millions on their convention centers are getting little or no payback. Boston's new center will attract 50,000 visitors during its first year in operation, only one-sixth of original projections. Attendance at major events in Chicago is half of what it was in 1993, though the city spent nearly $1 billion to expand its center. "The overall convention marketplace is declining in a manner that suggests that a recovery or turnaround is unlikely to yield much increased business for any given community," according to a Brookings Institution report by Professor Heywood Sanders.

Just when industry growth was skidding to a halt, New York was finally pushing the mob out of the Javits Center. Almost immediately, local hoteliers and state pols sought to expand Javits to cash in on all that convention-center business that they imagined New York could win but that didn't actually exist. After all, they reasoned, everyone must want to come conventioneering to New York—though surveys have shown that the city's high costs place it low on the list for many industry groups. Mayor Bloomberg subsequently made expanding Javits a centerpiece of his Far West Side/Olympics plan, even though predictions dating back 20 years that the original Javits Center would spark a stampede of new development had proven disastrously incorrect and the area around the center remained a virtual dead zone.

But convention centers, for all their hype and cost, aren't the most unproductive publicly financed urban megaprojects, by any means. That honor goes to stadiums and arenas, with their big subsidies to rich team owners and rich players. Starting in the late 1960s, municipalities began churning out these facilities, thinking that they would generate additional tax dollars and prompt new economic activity, even in moribund neighborhoods. In the last three decades, cities and states have built 40 publicly subsidized stadiums and 52 arenas.

The one thing that is not controversial about these facilities is their low worth as economic engines. As Smith College economist Andrew Zimbalist has written: "Few fields of empirical economic research offer virtual unanimity of findings. Yet independent work on the economic impact of stadiums and arenas has uniformly found that there is no statistically significant positive correlation between sports facilities construction and economic development." At least ten economists have reached the same conclusion, largely in peer-reviewed work, so that, as one reviewer of the literature recently noted: "It is virtually impossible to find an *independent* economist who views sports facility subsidies as good investments in local economic growth."

So what do we find as the centerpiece of the Far West Side plan? A stadium/convention-center complex joining together what are universally recognized as two of the worst economic-development engines in urban planning. How we got to this point is a case study of the propensity of government leaders, prompted by their own grandiose ideas and urged on by self-interested executives, to pervert the best-intentioned plans.

The Far West Side rezoning effort began with the city planning department's efforts to spur development during New York's 1990s economic expansion. As Gotham's job rolls grew faster than ever before, companies looked to build office buildings outside the city because they could no longer find sites for major towers in midtown. Suddenly, for about two years before 9/11, it looked as though the city would break out of its 40-year boom-and-bust economic cycle—in which no net job growth has taken place since the late 1960s—and emerge with a new, larger economy. This economic growth, combined with declining crime rates and the city's rising reputation, also promised to push up Gotham's population. In response, the Far West Side plan took shape: if New York City's economy and population were to expand, then that centrally located neighborhood could accommodate much of the growth.

But the Far West Side plan got hijacked—not once, but several times. First, Mayor Rudy Giuliani decided that all that space on the West Side was perfect for a new Yankee Stadium. Owner George Steinbrenner suggested that his team might leave the city without a West Side stadium, arguing that he needed a Manhattan venue to attract corporate sponsorships and young women, the new groups baseball was trying to attract. Neither group would go to the Bronx, he averred.

Of course, things turned out differently. Last year, the Yankees broke their own attendance record, attracting nearly 3.8 million people to the Bronx, the highest number in the major leagues and 55 percent more than the league average.

But in New York, bad ideas don't die; they just get reincarnated as even worse ideas. The Far West Side plan went from having no stadium to a Yankee Stadium, to a Jets football stadium—a stadium that has become the linchpin of an Olympics plan that would include towers built to accommodate the games before being recycled as office and hotel space for New York's expanding economy. With this idea, the tail really is wagging the dog.

Advocates of the Far West Side stadium acknowledge the overwhelming evidence that stadiums do not spur economic development, but they argue that what the city wants to build is something new and different, a sports venue that learns from past failures. Their models are new projects like one in Pittsburgh that encompasses two new stadiums on abandoned land along the Allegheny River, land that is beginning to attract residential and commercial development. How is Pittsburgh trying to overcome the deficiencies of stadiums as economic-development tools, according to the advocates? By paying attention to the basics. Officials are building a new light-rail transportation line to reconnect the area to downtown. The local development authority has rezoned the land to create new sites for office and residential building and has provided new access to the waterfront through a $47 million riverfront promenade. In short, government is doing everything that sensible urban planners would urge to unlock the potential of an underused waterfront area. But when a city does those things, it doesn't need to make a stadium the centerpiece of its plan, and the stadium is not what propels redevelopment.

Despite the track record of such big facilities, Mayor Bloomberg argues that New York needs a stadium to attract the Olympics, and it needs the Olympics to impel a host of new projects that otherwise wouldn't get built. It has now become fashionable to say that because of the anti-development attitudes of local Luddites and enviromaniacs, who stopped Manhattan's proposed Westway highway project 20 years ago, New York can't build anything any more, and that bringing the Olympics here, with all its attendant construction, is one way to bury this legacy. This is a strange argument, considering that right now there is more residential building going on in New York than at any time in the past generation, that commercial building reached a feverish pitch during the late 1990s boom, and that even long-delayed major infrastructure projects like the AirTrain and the renovation of JFK Airport are now proceeding apace.

> **"The one thing that is not controversial about stadiums is their low worth as economic engines."**

These days, the real impediment to major development in New York is government. It warehouses vast tracts of valuable land and uses narrowly drawn and outdated zoning laws to bar developers from constructing projects there without getting zoning variances—which gives the pols a big say in almost any significant building in the city and turns the real-estate business into a quasi-political activity, with a pay-to-play overtone.

Even worse, just look at New York's waste of valuable waterfront property. The city boasts more waterfront than any other American city—578 miles of it, stretching throughout the five boroughs. But much of the land is former industrial space that couldn't be recycled for new uses without government approval because it is still zoned for manufacturing. Having sat unused for years because there is little demand for manufacturing space in New York, large swathes of this land have been abandoned and taken over to be turned into parkland by the state, like the former Eastern District Rail Terminal on the Brooklyn waterfront or the Hudson River Park stretching from lower to mid-Manhattan. On these sites, government is transforming formerly productive land into land that must be forever supported by tax dollars, even while interest in waterfront development burgeons.

For example, a bidding war is raging over one of the few sites the state is making available for commercial development to help finance the Hudson River Park. Struggling over a pier near 15th Street are two groups: one led by Roland Betts, the force behind Chelsea Piers; and the other featuring real-estate executive Steven Witkoff and the Cipriani restaurant family. The winning group may wind up investing up to $150 million—an indication of the kind of investment that New York could spark if it made more waterfront property available for redevelopment.

Even when government frees land for economic development, it often insists on controlling the process itself and ends up accomplishing little. A prime example is the beautiful waterside site opposite Manhattan's East 30s known as Queens West, where boosters hope the Olympics village will rise. Controlled by three government entities, representing New York State, the city, and the Port Authority, the site has been under development for over 20 years, with just two apartment buildings to show for it on land that could accommodate a dozen. Infighting among the three government groups, together with obsessive micromanagement of the project, has hampered development, with the result that the site has missed several real-estate booms over the last two decades. And while that land sat fallow, similar ex-industrial land on the New Jersey waterfront opposite the West Side of Manhattan has witnessed an explosion of development, as government there encouraged builders and then got out of the way. Indeed, developer Samuel LeFrak began his massive Newport City project on the Jersey City waterfront after he grew frustrated with the government's wrangling over Queens West.

Ironically coming full circle, the organizers of the city's Olympics bid plan to use government-controlled land on or near the waterfront for everything from their stadium to the Olympics athletes' housing to a shooting range on the waterfront in Pelham Bay to a beach-volleyball site at the former Eastern District Rail Terminal. On many of these beautiful sites, what began as an economic-development plan will leave the city with nothing but unproductive leisure facilities, rather than tax-generating office or residential space. And in one further ironic twist, the organizers of the Olympics use government's laggard performance at Queens West as a justification for building the athletes' village there because, they say, no one else is likely to use the land soon.

Given the growing interest in the Far West Side—"you lick your chops for a piece of land that size," as one developer said recently—why is the city trying to force through a plan revolving around convention and stadium facilities that few independent observers think will accomplish what their boosters say they will? How did an effort to begin rezoning an underused part of the city in anticipation of new growth turn into the urban megaproject of all time?

One reason is that too many politicians, including New York's businessman mayor, have little confidence that the freewheeling free market really works. Mayor Bloomberg, for instance, has lately taken to saying that his Olympics plan is crucial to the economic future of New York, even though big parts of that plan rely on public financing that is questionable and even though the plan may cost city taxpayers hundreds of millions more than the mayor is anticipating. The mayor can't believe that alternate, privately financed proposals for the Far West Side, such as Cablevision's $600 million–plus proposal, are for real. But Cablevision's proposal stirred up private-sector interest in the site, forced the MTA to extract maximum value from the deal, and prompted the Jets to extend their own bid by adding partners to develop residential and office towers around their proposed stadium. The lesson in all this is that no stadium was needed in the first place to spur Far West Side development. All it took was government willingness to let the free market operate.

Of course, politicians love big projects because they make them seem like visionaries, and they create a physical legacy of their reign, like ex-governor Rockefeller's massive and mind-numbing Albany Mall. Pols are supported in their fits of pharaonic building by a powerful constituency, including the financiers who will benefit from the giant bond offerings, the hotel industry that hopes to see even a marginal increase in its business—no matter what the cost to the city—and the construction unions that see gigantic public building projects as more desirable than market-driven ones because they are usually subject to union-friendly regulations.

With all these special interests to be fed, government will gladly crowd out the private market to build its megaprojects. In the late 1990s, for instance, developer Larry Silverstein built an apartment tower on 42nd Street, near the Lincoln Tunnel—previously a residential no-man's-land. When Silverstein announced plans to build another building on an adjacent site, the state considered using eminent domain to seize the site for the expansion of the Javits Center. That, more than anything, should tell you what's wrong with state-sponsored projects: New York would actually contemplate derailing a largely privately financed project providing housing to an underused neighborhood—exactly the kind of project that represents the economic development that the convention center's expansion will never offer.

City Journal **architects imagine an ideal Far West Side.**

COMPUTER MODEL BY FRANCK LOHSEN McCRERY, ARCHITECTS

If state-sponsored megaprojects are not right for the Far West Side, then what is? How should the Far West Side be developed? For an answer, look at the rest of New York. The city did not spring up in one gigantic eruption. Neither midtown nor SoHo nor Harlem nor Greenwich Village is the product of a centrally planned vision; all of those districts have evolved bit by bit, layer upon layer over years, with diverse uses not only sharing these neighborhoods and feeding off one another, but also often competing vigorously in a way that ensures that the neighborhood will get maximum value and vitality out of the land.

Around the country, cities are discovering what is right in front of us in New York: that this is how districts grow. Increasingly, they are rejecting the megaproject, centrally planned–neighborhood approach, because it just doesn't work. Certainly whenever voters get a chance to register a preference on these plans, they say no.

So the city's first task should be to go back to the original intention of the Far West Side plan: to create the conditions for the marketplace to build on those 60 blocks of garages, parking lots, and other ramshackle structures only as and if demand requires it. Government should first of all continue the rezoning of the area for much denser residential and commercial uses. Too often, city officials wait until the end of an economic cycle to start such rezonings, and before their plan can work its way through the approval process, the economy has already turned down and the momentum to finish the rezoning evaporates. The city also ought to extend the Number 7 subway line into the district, since better transportation will spur its development, and that kind of infrastructure improvement is government's proper sphere.

Will the Far West Side ever be needed? I'm optimistic enough to think that sooner, rather than later—though certainly not next year or even the year after—Gotham's economy may regain the vibrancy of the late 1990s. If that happens, and the city adopts a plan that does more good than harm, the area will develop, block by block, project by project, in a variety of uses that are not part of some grand centrally planned government vision. It won't happen at once; it may even take more than one economic cycle; and no one politician will be able to take credit for it.

But it is possible that the city's boom-and-bust cycle of the last 40 years will just keep repeating itself, in which case much of the Far West Side will remain underdeveloped no matter how much money officials pour into megaprojects to spur the area. Moreover, the city will have built those projects by raising taxes, increasing public debt, and taking valuable public money from other sources, which, if the city's economy doesn't rebound, will only depress growth further.

The choice is clear. New York can recognize and remember what built a great metropolis, or it can head down the path that cities and neighborhoods across the country are rejecting after years of failure. ■

Should Felons Vote?

The push to let
convicts vote is
wrong on fact and
on principle.

Edward Feser

Forty-eight states currently restrict the right of felons to vote. Most states forbid current inmates to vote, others extend such bans to parolees, and still others disenfranchise felons for life. A movement to overturn these restrictions gained swift momentum during the 2004 presidential campaign, and pending legal and legislative measures promise to keep the issue in the headlines in the months to come. It hasn't escaped notice that the felon vote would prove a windfall for the Democrats; when they do get to vote, convicts and ex-cons tend to pull the lever for the Left. Had ex-felons been able to vote in Florida in 2000—the state permanently strips all felons of voting rights—Al Gore almost certainly would have won the presidential election.

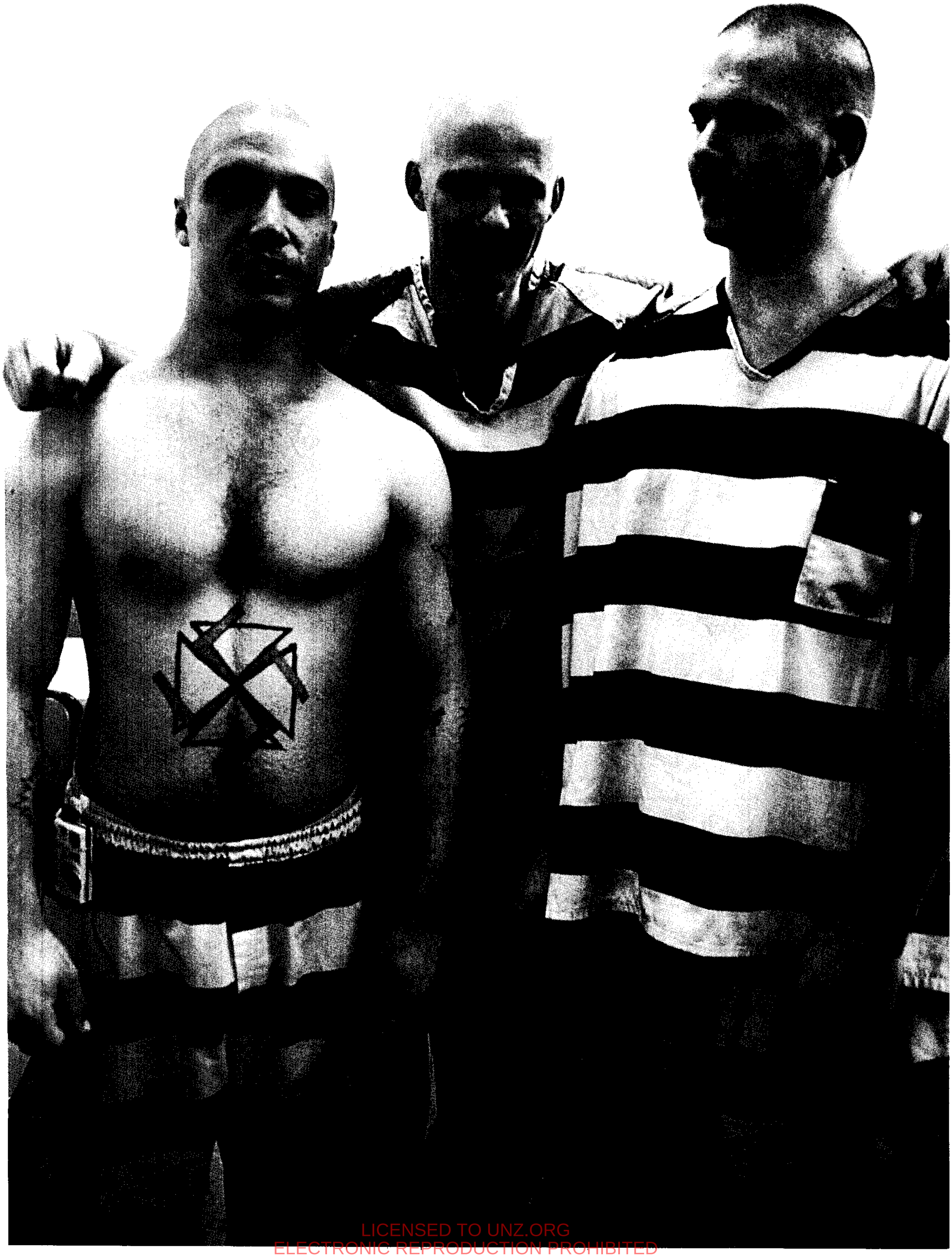
Murderers, rapists, and thieves might seem to be an odd constituency for a party that prides itself on its touchy-feely concern for women and victims. But desperate times call for desperate measures. After three national electoral defeats in a row, the Democrats need to enlarge their base. If that means reaching out to lock in the pedophile and home-invader vote, so be it. Even newly moderate Democrat Hillary Clinton has recently endorsed voting rights for ex-cons. This is inclusiveness with a vengeance.

The liberal advocates and Democratic politicians seeking the enfranchisement of felons deny any narrow political motivation, of course. Their interest is moral, they claim: it is just *wrong* to deny felons the vote. Their various arguments in support of this conclusion, though, fail to persuade.

The most frequently heard charge is that disenfranchising felons is racist because the felon population is disproportionately black. But the mere fact that blacks make up a lopsided percentage of the nation's prison population doesn't prove that racism is to blame. Is the mostly male population of the prisons evidence of reverse sexism? Of course not: men commit the vast majority of serious crimes—a fact no one would dispute—and that's why there are lots more of them than women behind bars. Regrettably, blacks also commit a disproportionate number of felonies, as victim surveys show. In any case, a felon either deserves his punishment or not, whatever his race. If he does, it may also be that he deserves disenfranchisement. His race, in both cases, is irrelevant.

A. RAMEY/PHOTOEDIT, INC.

Solid citizens?



But look where the laws preventing felons from voting arose, the advocates say: in bigoted post–Civil War legislatures, keen to keep newly emancipated blacks away from the ballot box. These laws are utterly racist in origin, like poll taxes and literacy tests. But this argument fails on two counts. First, as legal writer Roger Clegg notes, many of the same studies appealed to by felon advocates show that the policy of disenfranchising felons is as old as ancient Greece and Rome; it made its way to these shores not long after the American Revolution. By the time of the Civil War, 70 percent of the states already had such laws.

Second, even if felon disenfranchisement *did* have a disreputable origin, it wouldn't follow that the policy is bad. To think otherwise would be to commit what logicians call the genetic fallacy. Say Abraham Lincoln drafted the Emancipation Proclamation purely for cynical political reasons, or to exact vengeance on rebellious Southern plantation owners, or just to get rid of some unneeded scratch paper. It would be silly to suggest that therefore freeing the slaves wasn't a good thing.

Felon advocates also argue that to prevent felons from voting, especially after their release from prison, unfairly punishes them twice for the same crime. On this view, the ex-con pays his debt to society by doing time and should suffer no further punishment. But this begs the question at issue: should a felon lose his vote as well as spend time behind bars? Few people would say that the drunk driver sentenced by a judge to lose his driver's license and to pay a hefty fine is punished twice. Most would agree that, given the crime, this one punishment with two components is perfectly apt. Similarly, those who support disenfranchising felons do not believe in punishing criminals twice for the same misdeed; they believe in punishing them once, with the penalty including both jail time and the loss of the vote. A punishment of incarceration without disenfranchisement, they plausibly maintain, would be too lenient.

The claim that disenfranchising felons is wrong because the right to vote is basic and inalienable—another common argument of the advocates—is no more convincing. Obviously, the right is not basic and inalienable in any legal sense, since the laws banning murderers, thieves, and other wrongdoers from voting have stood for a long time. Nor is the right basic and inalienable in a moral sense. Even John Locke, the English philosopher generally regarded as having the greatest influence on the American founding, didn't view the franchise in that light. True, Locke believed that all human beings had certain rights by nature (such as rights to life, liberty, and property), that government existed to protect those rights, and that any legitimate government had to rest on the tacit consent of the people. But the government that the people consented to did not need to be democratic, in Locke's view—it might even be monarchical. As long as it protected the basic rights of citizens and retained their loyalty, it remained legitimate, whether or not it allowed its citizens to vote.

Further, Locke added, under certain circumstances we can lose even the rights we do have by nature. Someone who violates another's rights to life, liberty, and property forfeits his own rights to these things; society can legitimately punish him by removing these rights. The criminal has broken the social compact and violated the trust of his fellow citizens. He cannot reasonably complain if they mete out to him a measure of the very harm that he has inflicted on them. Their doing so is a means of dissuading others from breaking the social contract.

Seen in this light, disenfranchisement seems a particularly appropriate punishment for felons. The murderer, rapist, or thief has expressed contempt for his fellow citizens and broken the rules of society in the most unmistakable way. It's fitting that society should deprive him of his role in determining the content of those rules or electing the magistrate who enforces them.

A *New York Times* editorial this past February favored felon voting—no surprise there—but put forward a different rationale. The disenfranchisement of felons, the paper held, "may actually contribute to recidivism by keeping ex-offenders and their families disengaged from the civic mainstream"—a notion "clearly supported by data showing that former offenders who vote are less likely to return to jail."

The *Times*'s argument is at least more serious than those considered so far. Still, it doesn't fly. Recidivism doubtless is also less common among ex-cons who return their videos on time. That doesn't mean they should be rewarded with free rental privileges at Blockbuster. More to the point, it doesn't seem to have occurred to the *Times* that it might be misinterpreting the (alleged) causal connection between voting and keeping out of trouble. Surely it's at least plausible—in fact, quite plausible—that it is precisely the sort of person disposed to learn from his mistakes and become more conscientious who is likely to vote in the first place. That is, it isn't that voting makes someone responsible but that the responsible person will be likelier to vote.

If that's true, then a former inmate who already has what it takes to clean up his act isn't likely to relapse into a life of crime just because he can't cast a ballot. By the same logic, an ex-con hell-bent on new rapes and muggings isn't going to turn over a new leaf just because he gets to vote—even if it's to vote for a Democrat. The notion that he might is pure sentimentality. It assumes that deep inside the typical burglar or car jacker lurks a Morgan Freeman–type character, full of world-weary wisdom and latent civic virtue. A neoconservative, some say, is a liberal mugged by reality. A felon-vote advocate seems to be a liberal who has seen *The Shawshank Redemption* one too many times.

It would be a tall order for any moral or political theory, let alone the Lockean one central to the American tradition, to make a convincing case that the disenfranchisement of felons is particularly unjust. How is depriving felons of the vote worse than stripping them of their freedom by incarcerating them? Surely the right to liberty is far more basic and fundamental than the franchise. Yet few would deny that it's legitimate to deprive serious criminals of their liberty. To do so, after all, would be to deny the possibility of criminal justice.

"The criminal has broken the social compact and violated the trust of his fellow citizens."

Perhaps, though, some advocates of felon voting have trouble with the basic concept of criminal justice. Traditional notions of desert, punishment, and retribution aren't in fashion among those whose hearts bleed more for perpetrators than for victims. The movement to give felons the vote may be a sign that the tough-on-crime New Democrat is as passé as the Kerry campaign: for a whiff of the criminal-as-victim mind-set seems to surround the whole enterprise. The *Times* editorial coos over unnamed "democracies abroad" that "valu[e] the franchise so much that they take ballot boxes right to the prisons." It would have been more accurate to say that they "value the idea of individual responsibility so little that they take ballot boxes right to the prisons."

Such countries devalue the franchise by throwing it away on murderers and other criminals, whose fellow citizens' blood is still fresh on their hands. Such hands can only defile a ballot. If the right to vote is as precious as felon advocates claim to believe it is, we should expect people to uphold at least some minimum moral standards in order to keep it—such as refraining from violating their fellow voters' own inalienable rights.

Those pushing for felon voting will thus need to come up with much better arguments before they can hope to convince their fellow citizens. They ought at least to try. People might otherwise begin to suspect that the hope of gaining political advantage is the only reason they advocate reform.

Urbanities

Vaudeville's Brief, Shining Moment

Stefan Kanfer

It was the most democratic popular art in American history. To get onstage, all you needed was chutzpah and moxie. If you had the right stuff, you picked up the dance steps, the vocal style, the comic timing that could make you a star—maybe even one of the Marx Brothers. No wonder their mother, Mimi, loved vaudeville. And millions of fans and thousands of performers agreed. Yet despite its profound influence on every facet of entertainment, from the musical to the television sitcom, American vaudeville had a trajectory as astonishingly brief—if sparkling—as a Roman candle.

The word "vaudeville" derives from the French *vau-de-vire*, referring to the Valley of the Vire in Normandy, where itinerant singers amused the crowds with double entendre–packed songs. The tradition soon crossed the pond and by the mid-nineteenth century had become even trashier. Coarse buffoons and loose women formed the customary fare. In *Huckleberry Finn*, those two wandering frauds, the King and the Duke, offer a typical act, the Royal Nonesuch. In big type, the handbill warns customers: WOMEN AND CHILDREN NOT ADMITTED. "There," says the Duke, admiring his handiwork. "If that line don't fetch them, I don't know Arkansaw!" The routine, Huck reports, features the King "a-prancing out on all fours, naked; and he was painted all over, ring-streaked-and-striped, all sorts of colors, as splendid as a rainbow. . . . Well, it would have made a cow laugh to see the shines that old idiot cut."

Such travesties placed vaudeville performers at the bottom tier of show business, at a time when even legitimate theater folk drew suspicion. "Respectable" hotels and restaurants barred vaudevillians. The rooming houses and cafeterias that did admit them were always on the wrong side of the tracks. Even in more relaxed New York City, reformers began closing in during the last two decades of the nineteenth century.

And then came an unexpected moral turnaround, as profound as the change in Victorian society from loose to upright. The King-and-Duke sort of vaudeville received the thorough laundering it needed in 1881, when Tony Pastor, owner of a 14th Street New York music hall, made the calculation that Walt Disney repeated some 50 years later: a theater that excluded women and children curtailed its income by at least 67 percent.

The plump, mustachioed impresario had been showing pirated and racy versions of Gilbert and Sullivan, among them *The Pie Rats of Pen Yan*. Now, Pastor shut his adjoining barroom, forbade smoking (he was always ahead of his time), and presented a carefully supervised variety program. All performers had to clean up their acts before they dared to step upon his stage. Obscenity, vulgarity, and irreverence became taboo. Gone were such saline japes as:

Man: My sister-in-law
thinks "lettuce" is a
proposition.
Woman: She never
married, did she?
Man: No, her children
wouldn't let her.

Woman: Someone is fooling with my knee.
Man: It's me, and I'm not
fooling.

Nor could patrons hear the closing song made famous in British music halls and sung on the streets of America:

What's that for, eh? Oh,
tell me Ma.
If you won't tell me, I'll
ask Pa.
But Ma said, "Oh, it's
nothing,
Hold your row."
Well, I've asked Johnny
Jones, see,
So I know now!
(CURTAIN)

Those who ignored the new rules wound up in burlesque, defined by a contemporary edition of Webster's as: "A theatrical entertainment of broad and earthy humor; consists of comic skits and short turns (and sometimes striptease)." The same dictionary described vaudeville more approvingly:

Buster Keaton and his parents

PHOTOFEST

PHOTOFEST

The Four Nightingales: (from top to bottom) Harpo, Groucho, and Gummo Marx, and Lou Lewis

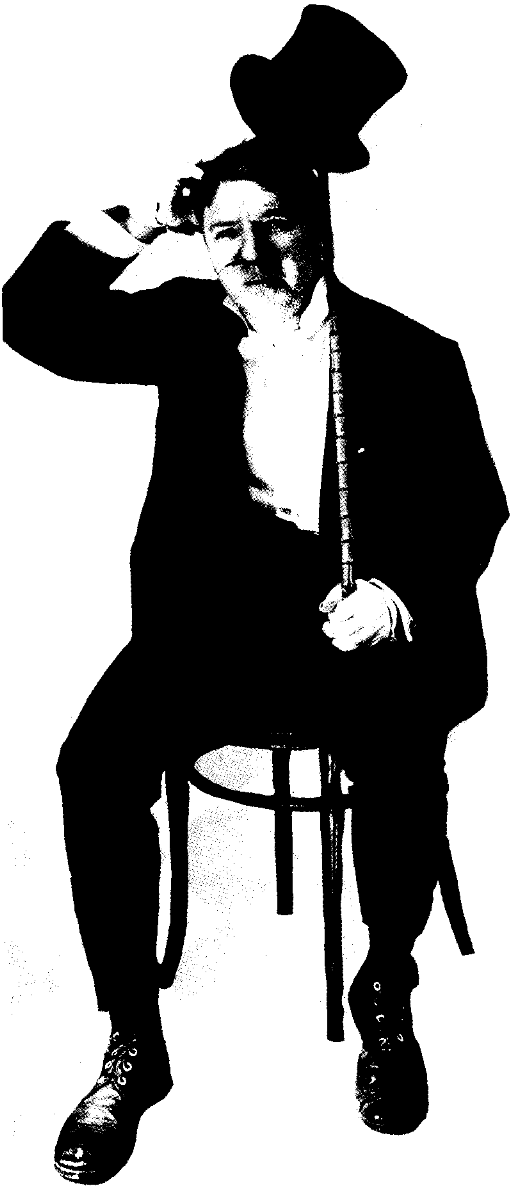
"A stage entertainment of successive separate performances, usually songs, dances, acrobatic acts, dramatic sketches."

Thus arrived the first family shows, where wives, husbands, kids, even unescorted women could while away an evening without blushing. The new conventions and standards weren't easy for performers to meet, however. As Charles and Louise Samuels observe in *Once Upon a Stage*, the majority of vaudevillians emerged from the slums, uneducated and untrained. After winning an amateur night or two, a performer would usually find himself booked into a small theater in a backwater—and often in a state—where he had never been before. Vaudevillians had to "discover by themselves how to dress, walk on the stage, talk to the audience with just the right mixture of humility and pride, find the right songs and material." In addition to the intimidating audience that lyricist Oscar Hammerstein II called the "Big Black Giant," "there were bad-tempered, dictatorial house managers who took delight in cutting your material, hounding you, doing everything possible to break your spirit."

Performers with bulletproof egos kept going; the others faded away. It was a hard life. Out of some 20,000 choristers, group acts, and soloists performing across America, less than 2 percent would make a good living out of vaudeville. Fewer still would enjoy celebrity. Yet *Times* critic Brooks Atkinson was right: despite its drawbacks, vaudeville gave audiences "a brilliant form of stage entertainment that expressed skill, personality and ideas, and presented some of the most talented actors of all time."

Those talents have long since vanished, and so have the venues where they performed, razed or transformed into octoplex movie houses. Vanished too are producers with the audacity and instinct that breathed life into vaudeville—producers like Oscar Hammerstein the first, grandfather of the lyricist. The German immigrant began his career as a cigar maker, developed a machine for turning out stogies with compressed air, obtained patents for several other inventions, and invested the income in real estate. He put up a couple of theaters in Harlem, parlayed the profits into an opera house on 34th Street and Broadway, and then made the move that would win him the title "The Creator of Times Square."

Between 44th and 45th Streets on Broadway, then a nondescript part of midtown, Oscar erected the Olympia, encompassing a music hall, a theater, and a smaller concert arena. To control every aspect of show business, he hired his three sons as supervisors. Harry looked after construction, Arthur took care of the decorating, and Willie (father of Oscar II) booked the talent that would appear at the posh new houses.


PHOTOFEST

W. C. Fields

Trouble is, the houses were costly and wasteful, as well as grand. Even after selling off his other properties, Oscar had to declare bankruptcy in 1898. Broke, he ran into a friend. "My fortune," he sighed, "consists of two cigars. I will share it with you." In fact, no one could take his greatest assets from him—his self-confidence and his gift for self-promotion. He talked friends into lending him some venture capital and built yet another theater, the Victoria, located between 42nd and 43rd Streets on Broadway. A reporter described it as "a big, tinkling pearl box—all white and gold with the opals of electricity studding it in profusion, gorgeous carpets, splendid lounges, and all the ultra-elegance of an ultra-elegance-loving metropolis."

Hammerstein began with dramas and musical shows before turning the Victoria into a two-a-day vaudeville house. Thoroughly modern Willie booked popular singers and comedians, and a very different sort of headliner—the kind who made the front and back pages of the tabloids: Jack Johnson, the first black heavyweight champ; Lady Hope, who showed off the enormous Hope diamond; and Captain Cook, who claimed (falsely) to have discovered the North Pole. Other producers, taking note, began to flourish their own celebrities: the brilliant blind and deaf Helen Keller, who did nothing but answer a few questions written into her palm; the saloon-smashing prohibitionist Carrie Nation; and the silent but scandalous "girl on the red velvet swing," Evelyn Nesbitt, whose husband, drug-addicted socialite Harry K. Thaw, had murdered her former lover, the world-renowned architect Stanford White (audiences happily paid good money for a glimpse of the first twentieth-century sex kitten).

On occasion, Willie erred. The heavyweight champion John L. Sullivan starred in a truncated *Uncle Tom's Cabin* and noticed that the actor playing Uncle Tom was getting more applause. The Great John L. erupted one night after "Tom" took his fifth bow, and chased him into the street. But Willie rarely went wrong when he took the murderess route. Florence Burns had shot her lover in Brooklyn after he had dumped her for another woman. Let off on probation, she used the time to play in vaudeville. At the Victoria, Florence tried a dance step or two, to show that she could do something with her feet as well as her hands, but the routine failed to please the critics. One compared her to "a sidewheel steamer catching a porpoise." The crowds came to gawk anyway. Other glamorous criminals included Ethel Conrad and Lillian Graham, who had conspired to kill W. E. D. Stokes, a rich hotel owner. Willie billed them "The Shooting Stars."

Effective as the Hammersteins could be at vaudeville presentations, their efforts paled beside those of two shrewd New England impresarios, Benjamin Franklin Keith and Edward Franklin Albee. Keith began his ascent in the circus, running a sideshow populated with freaks, strongmen, fortune-tellers, and other wonders. He hired Albee (adoptive grandfather of the playwright) to look after the animals. E.F. was just as smart as B.F., and soon the men worked as equals, operating the Keith Circuit, a string of vaudeville houses across the country.

Keith was an upright, hands-on manager who repaired the broken seats himself. His parsimonious, deeply religious wife scrubbed the floors of the theaters near their Manhattan office and ran a boardinghouse for actors. She made certain that no ladies showed up in single gentlemen's rooms after dark. And she saw to it that the artistes' onstage behavior never embarrassed the Keith name. A young juggler, Fred Allen, who later put down his Indian clubs and became a radio superstar, recalled a sign posted backstage along the Keith-Albee circuit:

> NOTICE TO PERFORMERS
>
> Don't say "slob" or "son-of-a-gun" or "hully gee" on this stage unless you want to be canceled peremptorily. Do not address anyone in the audience in any manner. If you have not the ability to entertain Mr. Keith's audiences without risk of offending them, do the best you can. Lack of talent will be less open to censure than would be an insult to a patron. If you are in doubt as to the character of your act, consult the local manager before you go on the stage, for if you are guilty of uttering anything sacrilegious or even suggestive, you will be immediately closed and will never again be allowed in a theater where Mr. Keith is in authority.

Albee was no less rigid, but profit, not deportment, consumed him. In 1902, when a group of actors decided to unionize, he bought off the leaders with two-year contracts, shattering the organization. Six years later, when S. Z. Poli, owner of a smaller string of New England theaters, decided to break the Keith-Albee stranglehold by booking talent on his own, Albee promptly informed banks in every city with a Poli theater that the Keith circuit planned to build a grand theater there, which would doubtless drive the town's other vaudeville houses out of business. When the banks called in all of Poli's outstanding debts, he agreed to book his performers through the Keith office.

The following year, the Keith houses raked in some $30 million. As Albee had made his point fiscally, Keith

BROWN BROTHERS

A young Fred and Adele Astaire

had made his morally. Under his aegis, vaudeville not only acquired class; it became as formalized as a minuet. In his online history of vaudeville, John Kenrick describes the typical bill of fare at major houses. "The 'Opening' was a 'silent act' that would not be ruined by the bustle of an audience settling in"—trained seals and acrobats, say. Next came juvenile acts like the Gumm Sisters, whose youngest member later changed her name to Judy Garland, and the Nicholas Brothers, dancing troupers who subsequently became headliners. A comedy sketch or one-act play would follow. Customarily, these featured names from the legitimate theater, including Sarah Bernhardt, Alfred Lunt, and the Barrymores—Lionel, John, and Ethel.

BROWN BROTHERS

Bert Williams (top) and Leon Erroll in *The Ziegfeld Follies*

Then came an eccentric novelty act. This might involve a magician who sawed his spangled assistant in half, or a mind reader, or a trio like the Three Keatons: mother, father, and Buster, "the Human Broom"—father Keaton delighted audiences by grabbing his son by the ankles and sweeping tables, chairs, and the floor with the boy's hair. Other favorites included the escape artist Houdini, who would emerge from a sealed coffin; Julian Eltinge, a female impersonator; and Julius Tannen, a monologist celebrated for his word pictures: he said that using a paper cup reminded him of drinking out of a letter, and excused himself for being late by explaining that he had squeezed out too much toothpaste and couldn't get it back into the tube. A little girl caught his act in upstate New York; to her, Tannen was pure enchantment: "Just this voice," wrote Lucille Ball, "and this magnificent man enthralling you with his stories, his intonations. He changed my life. I knew it was a very serious, wonderful thing to be able to make people laugh and/or cry, to be able to play on their emotions."

Celebrities of note, famous or notorious, held fifth place. That brought down the curtain on Part One.

Part Two opened with a large set and a lot of people onstage. Choirs, novelty orchestras, and trained tiger-and-lion acts were favorites.

The seventh spot—"next to closing" in vaudeville-speak—was for the big names. One of the customers' favorite teams, Ed Gallagher and Al Shean (the Marx Brothers' uncle) spouted doggerel inspired by the headlines or by old jokes set to rhyme and music.

Shean: Oh, Mr. Gallagher,
oh, Mr. Gallagher.
Gallagher: Hello, what's on
your mind this morning,
Mr. Shean?
Shean: Everybody's making

fun
Of the way our country's
run,
All the papers say
We'll soon live European.
Gallagher: Why, Mr. Shean,
why Mr. Shean,
On the day they took away
our old canteen,
Cost of living went so high
That it's cheaper now to die.
Shean: Positively, Mr.
Gallagher.
Gallagher: Absolutely, Mr.
Shean.
(CURTAIN)

Those gentlemen enjoyed a comparatively brief, if intense, vogue, and never crossed over to the new media of film and radio. Other headliners did, including Keaton, Jack Benny, W. C. Fields, Al Jolson, Sophie Tucker, the Marx Brothers, Charlie Chaplin (whom Fields grumpily described as "a God-damned ballet dancer"), George Burns and Gracie Allen, and Eddie Cantor.

The finale was for acts on the way down. By now patrons were donning coats, chatting, and heading for the aisles. If they bothered to turn around, they saw a monotonous singer, a cacophonous one-man band, a juggler of little note. Occasionally, these bookings surprised. The Cherry Sisters were so inept that they won a pre-camp eminence. Ranging in number from two to five, the group sang off-key and had such bad timing that audiences threw vegetables at them: an enterprising manager began to sell produce outside the theater. The Cherries warbled behind a net to avoid injury.

PHOTOFEST

Sophie Tucker

In the new century, these performances that cost so little—rarely more than $1—and gave so much, beguiled not just the common folk but intellectuals, too. As novelist William Dean Howells wrote in *Harper's*, "I am an inveterate vaudeville-goer, for the simple reason that I find better acting, and better drama, than you get on your legitimate stage."

Urbanities

Moving up the vaudeville ladder could be as hard as a shortstop's climb from Class B to the majors. Nostalgia sweetens entertainers' recollections; their memoirs often throw a golden light on the early years of mean boardinghouses, meager salaries, and hecklers. Still, the best of them are candid about the long and arduous climb to the top of the marquee.

Brooklyn-born Mae West put in years as a shrewd, ambitious chorine before scoring with a series of risqué Hollywood films that resuscitated nearly bankrupt Paramount Pictures in the 1930s. She never failed to praise vaudeville as the night school where she learned "to adjust mood, tempo and material." The husky-voiced high-camp temptress went on to observe, archly, "I didn't get it from books."

Neither did Minnie Marx's son Arthur, better known as Harpo. "If an audience didn't like the Marx Brothers," he wrote, "we had no trouble finding it out." Southern audiences pelted the Yorkville kids "with sticks, bricks, spitballs, cigar butts, peach pits and chewed-out stalks of sugarcane. We took all this without flinching—until Minnie gave us the high-sign that she'd collected our share of the receipts. Then we started throwing the stuff back at the audience and ran like hell for the railroad station the second the curtain came down."

PHOTOFEST

Producer E. F. Albee

Arthur's studious brother Julius remembered Mama pushing him onstage in tank town after tank town, then city after city, watching the young man invent and reinvent himself with an accumulation of staccato delivery, insult jokes, outrageous puns, and fluid slouch. "When we were playing small-time vaudeville," he told a friend years later, "I would try a line and if it got a laugh, I'd leave it in. If it didn't get a laugh, I'd take it out and write another line. Pretty soon, I had a character called Groucho."

A rotund young woman made her entry one amateur night in Connecticut—and got the hook even before she stepped onstage. "This one's so ugly," said the theater manager, "the crowd up front will razz her. Better get some cork and black her up. She'll kill 'em." That she did, and Sophie Tucker, the Last of the Red Hot Mamas, remained in blackface, hiding her race, if not her talent, for five years.

Fred Astaire (né Austerlitz) from Omaha also harkened back to his days as a vaudeville hoofer. He and sister Adele opened a show in New York—and met with silence. The next day, they cased the board listing the order of acts. A "cold sweat set in when I couldn't find our names anywhere at all," Astaire wrote.

"Confused, I went to the doorman and asked him what this meant.

" 'Sonny,' he said, 'I heard the manager say they had to make a change. Why don't you run out to his office and see him? He's there now.'

"We went out and got the story from the manager. He said simply, 'I'm sorry kids—your act wasn't strong enough. You've been canceled.' That was it. There is no worse blow to a vaudevillian than that word 'canceled.' " The Astaires persevered nonetheless. Adele married a British aristocrat and retired from the stage. And Fred . . . well.

Bob Hope had trouble getting started, too. He ruefully recollected a time in Texas: "When I walked before my first Fort Worth audience with my fast talk, I might as well have kept walking to the Rio Grande. Nobody cared. I couldn't understand it. I came back offstage, threw my derby on the floor and told the unit manager, 'Get me a ticket back to my own country.' "

BROWN BROTHERS

Al Jolson

Urbanities

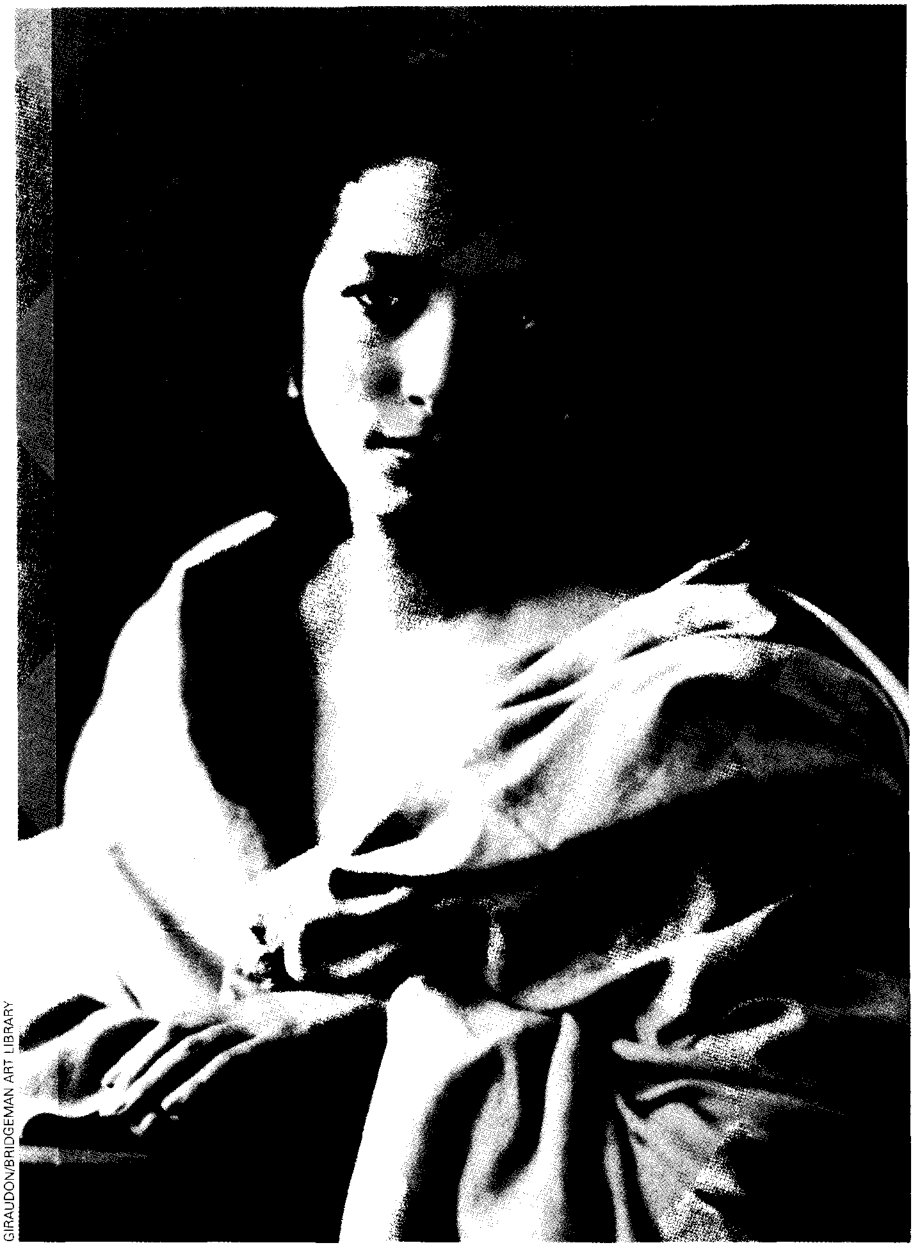
THE GRANGER COLLECTION, NEW YORK

Charlie Chaplin

George Burns, who eventually joined with his wife, Gracie Allen, to become one of the prime comedians of radio and television and film, had a similarly rough beginning. Week after week he would change his name, hoping that a fresh reputation would rise from the ashes of the previous one. "I joined up with another guy, and we called the act Burns and Links. My name was Links. Confusing isn't it? We were a two-man dancing act, and couldn't get a job anywhere." Sitting outside an agent's office, they overheard him speaking on the phone: "I could use a dog act in Ronkonkoma." George asked the receptionist to give her boss a message. "Burns and Links and their dogs are sitting outside." Landing a one-night contract for $10, the pair quickly acquired two stray mutts. "The act opened with eight bars of an introduction, 'Down Among the Sheltering Pines,' pianissimo, offstage, then a repeat of eight bars same, forte, and we would run onstage holding our straw hats high in the air with one hand so the audience could see the red linings. This time we ran out, hats in the air, and dogs under our arms. We dropped the dogs, finished the act, collected the $10, and I changed my name again." When it became Burns, and he got a partner named Allen, it was gravy from then on.

William Claude Dukenfield, better known as W. C. Fields, switched from juggler to comedian in his vaudeville years. He described the metamorphosis, starting with "a trick in which I toss a silk hat on the rim of which lies a lighted cigar, from my foot, balancing a hat on my nose as it falls, while I catch the cigar and go on smoking. Half the time I fail to do it on the first trial, but by means of a lot of little extra comedy turns following the failure, I usually succeed in making my audience believe my failure is intentional. Though my regular time is 21 minutes, I rarely get through in less than 25 or 26 minutes. The additional time is taken up with laughter."

Fields's contemporary, another New Yorker named Milton Berle (né Berlinger), had his own vaudeville memories. "It took monologists like Jack Benny and Bob Hope and me 18 months to two years to get seven solid minutes to put into an act," Berle observed. "You weeded out the crap, deleted and edited stuff that wouldn't play. Then when you went to Wilkes-Barre, it had to be changed again. And then another town, and still more changes." Shaking his head, he asked rhetorically, "Where can you get that kind of training today?"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Sarah Bernhardt

Every one of these headliners began in "Small Time"—little theaters where they made maybe $15 a week while they polished their dance steps and songs or tried out new jokes. One manager "who was in the raincoat business," Fred Allen recalled, "tried to talk the actors into taking their salaries in raincoats." In Bayonne, New Jersey, Allen went on, "during my act, a cat came down the aisle, emitted a series of blood-curdling cries, and delivered a litter on the carpet." Riposted Allen, "I thought my act was a monologue, not a catalogue."

The most promising troupers moved on to "Medium Time"—second-class theaters in first-class cities, at salaries from $75 to a few hundred dollars a week. In one of those houses, a New York hoofer named James Cagney broke into show business. "A three-act," he recalled, "needed a replacement for one of their number. This act was Parker, Rand and Leach, and Mr. Leach was Archie Leach, now known to history as Cary Grant." In Medium Time, Cagney found that vaudevillians "knew something that ultimately I came to understand and believe—that audiences are the ones who determine material. I remember Dr. Johnson's couplet: 'The drama's laws, the drama's patrons give, / And we who live to please must please to live.' "

"Big Time" was the acme—a two-a-day format in the top venues in major cities. Those in the "next to closing" slot earned well over $1,000 a week, when the average workman took home $40 for five and a half days' labor. Fields belonged in that august company; so did comedienne Fanny Brice, the kilted Scotsman Sir Harry Lauder, Bob Hope, Jack Benny, Fred Allen, and the former Metropolitan Opera singer Fritzi Sheff. An awed Buster Keaton recalled the week that he played on a bill with her: "This little lady carried 36 pieces of luggage and an entourage consisting of her pianist, a chauffeur, a footman and two French maids." A week before she arrived in each city, Keaton reports, she'd send an interior decorator to redo her suite and dressing room, with "magnificent mirrors with gold frames and drapes suitable to one of the fabulous boudoirs at Versailles."

Big Time's center was New York City. After Hammerstein, Albee, and Keith, producer Martin Beck, who had recently bombed in Chicago, tried again on the Great White Way in 1913, with a brand-new Palace Theater in the theater district's heart. But as the last coats of paint went on and the last members of the cast signed short-term contracts, the Hammersteins announced that Beck had violated an agreement. Their Victoria Theater owned exclusive rights to all Keith vaudeville acts from 34th Street to Columbus Circle. With a large, glistening theater and no one to play in it, Beck agreed to buy the Hammersteins' rights to the talent for an unheard-of $225,000. On opening night, critics lauded the 1,800 plush seats, huge crystal chandeliers, ivory and bronze decorations, and lobby walls of Siena marble—but not the headline act: La Napierowska, a Polish danseuse.

The World scoffed at the "Polish representative of the great horde of wriggle dancers who have swooped down on New York. This lady was supposed to be stung by a bee. She divested herself of her clothing to find it. She called herself a classical dancer but no one seemed to notice it." The comedian at the bottom of the bill was swept away with the debris, and Ed Wynn, like the danseuse, pushed on. Willie Hammerstein gloated over the Palace's dim future: "I give it six months."

His crystal ball was cloudy. As the theater entered its sixth week of half-life, Beck engaged established superstar Ethel Barrymore. She appeared in a one-act melodrama by dashing journalist Richard Harding Davis, who had covered the Spanish-American and Boer wars. The bill also boasted the singing Courtney Sisters; Bessie Clayton, a brilliant ballet dancer; and Nat Wills, "The Comedy Tramp." Wills's wife had been a circus bareback rider; when they split, he laconically drawled: "I should have married the horse." They all played to SRO houses.

Following that bill came Sarah Bernhardt, the French stage doyenne. Emoting in English, she treated onlookers to the death scene from *Camille* and surefire excerpts from other European dramas. Every performance of her 17-day run overflowed. *Variety* had ridiculed the Palace's "outrageous" policy of charging $2 for the best seats; now the theater asked $2.50, and scalpers got as much as $10 for a pair.

After that, the Palace was a symbol of accomplishment. If an act could make it there, it could make it anywhere. Entertainers who had appeared at that theater never let anyone forget it. One manager of another theater wearily nailed a sign near his dressing rooms:

DON'T TELL ME HOW YOU
KILLED THEM AT THE PALACE
DO IT HERE

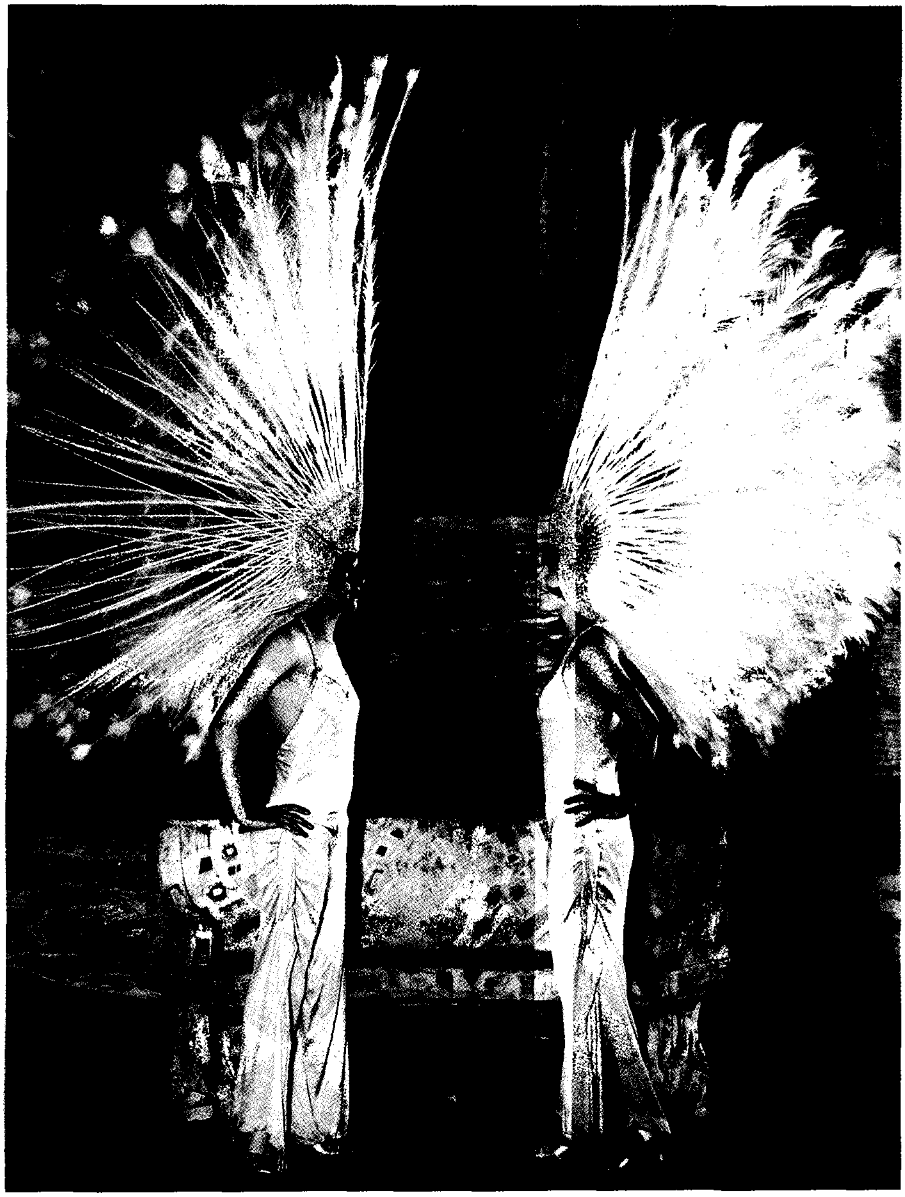
Yet with all the power that vaudeville exerted, it still lacked a final ingredient: elegance. That was B.Z.: Before Ziegfeld. Like Martin Beck, Florenz Ziegfeld had started off in Chicago, where his father owned a failing nightclub. As a last resort, he let young Flo take over the bookings. In came "The World's Strongest Man," George Sandow, who wrestled a drugged lion and turned the season into a winner. Next stop: Broadway. After producing a few so-so musicals, Ziegfeld had a brief marriage to singer Anna Held. She left Flo with bitter memories and one thing of value: the suggestion to stage a revue patterned after the les Folies Bergère of Paris.

The Ziegfeld Follies debuted in 1907 at the New York Theater's roof garden, where evening breezes eased the fierce summer heat. From the start, the impresario sought the best talent in show business. His director was Julian Mitchell, a former dancer who would put his head against a piano to feel a song's beat, and then create dynamic staging for it. Designing the scenery was the great art-deco architect Joseph Urban. Lady Duff-Gordon and Erté did the costumes. Follies comedians included Bert Williams, the first black luminary to star on the same stage with white folks; lariat-twirling Will Rogers; Eddie Cantor; the original Funny Girl, Fanny Brice; the dancing Dolly Twins, who would mirror each other's moves perfectly; and Ed Wynn, the bottom-of-the-bill comic Flo had spotted at the Palace during its disastrous opening weeks. Even with all this talent, the key ingredient was the line of females singing the songs and wearing the skimpy (though always decorous) fur-trimmed or spangled costumes. Irving Berlin's song, written at Ziegfeld's behest, said it all:

PHOTOFEST

Mae West

A pretty girl is like a
melody


BROWN BROTHERS

***The Ziegfeld Follies* girls**

That haunts you night and
  day.
Just like the strain
Of a haunting refrain,
She'll start upon
A marathon
And run around your brain.

Berlin's number became the *Follies'* unofficial anthem, but Ziegfeld showcased a series of best-selling tunes, including "Shine On Harvest Moon," "By the Light of the Silvery Moon," and "Second Hand Rose," the comic number that made Fannie Brice's reputation—and Barbra Streisand's two generations later.

When the U.S. entered the Great War, Ziegfeld, now married to the beautiful actress Billie Burke, decked his chorines out in military uniforms—except for one who bared a breast, impersonating Liberty as shown in various paintings. In the midst of this triumph came the horrific 1918 flu epidemic, in which some 550,000 Americans died in a matter of weeks, forcing theaters to close around the country. It nearly ruined Flo. But he hung on out of a stubborn belief in himself and in the future, presenting show after show to almost empty houses as he edged closer to insolvency. His faith held. The plague stopped as suddenly as it had begun, and customers trickled back. The boom picked up where it had left off, and by the end of the War to End All Wars, as historian John Kenrick notes, "a subtle yet momentous change had taken place. America had shifted from being a debtor nation to being a lender to the world." The citizens wanted to party, and vaudeville led the way.

The party briefly broke up in 1919, after the nascent Actors Equity Association, demanding better pay and job security, struck, and the Stagehands Union honored the walkout. Almost every theater shut down. The producers recognized Equity and met its demands, and reopened their shows, gratified to see that the lines of ticket buyers reached clear around the block. Equity didn't represent black performers, however. Instead, the Theater Owners Booking Agency—T.O.B.A.—represented "colored" performers, who played to all-Negro audiences in segregated theaters. The actors said the initials really stood for Tough On Black Asses, because the fees fell far below those paid up north. These stars developed a hard glitter: Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith became recording stars; Bill "Bojangles" Robinson went on to Broadway and Hollywood.

By now, Ziegfeld's success had encouraged others to cash in on the postwar festivities. The Shuberts, theater owners and producers, offered a series of revues called *Artists and Models*. George White, a dancer turned impresario, labeled his shows *The Scandals*. While Flo was still covering the American Girl, White, sensing a Roaring Twenties swing away from propriety, was busy undressing her. *The Scandals* featured abbreviated skirts that finally drove critic Percy Hammond to complain, "The knee is a joint, not an entertainment."

Audiences disagreed and made the producer a millionaire. Unlike *Ziegfeld's Follies*, White's *Scandals* gained special luster not from the chorus lines but from the melodic ones. George and Ira Gershwin wrote the *Scandals'* music, and their songs included "I'll Build a Stairway to Paradise" and "Somebody Loves Me." The songwriting trio of De Silva, Brown, and Henderson offered hits like "Life Is Just a Bowl of Cherries." Earl Carroll, a former songwriter, produced a series of *Vanities*, outdoing White by starring chorus girls in their underwear—and sometimes less.

To compensate for an exuberant lack of taste, Carroll presented first-rate comedians like Fields and Benny. Both men were fearless practitioners of

BROWN BROTHERS

The Dolly Twins

their art—except when it came to one act. The two hated to appear with the Marx Brothers. In his memoirs, Fields commented, "They sang, danced, played the harp, and kidded in zany style, were vaudeville entertainers. Never saw so much nepotism or such hilarious laughter in my life. The only act I could never follow." Benny echoed: "My God, they did 35 minutes of their own stuff, and when my quiet act followed, it was disaster!" Nonetheless, the Marxes did give him some benefits. "After a while I used to stand in the wings and laugh like hell; which meant I stopped worrying about my act."

Vaudeville remained big in the early twenties, but as the decade wound down, two inventions started to make fatal inroads: radio and films. By then Keith had died, and Albee had wrested control of the Palace from Martin Beck. Marcus Loew, onetime furrier and currently owner of a group of nickelodeons, had come on the scene, combining live acts and two-reelers at his New York showcase, Loew's State. The theater had well over 3,000 seats, charged less than the Palace, and grossed more.

Unsettled, Albee ordered one of his ushers to buy a ticket at Loew's State as soon as the box office opened—and another just as it closed. Since the tickets had consecutive numbers, Albee could figure out exactly how many people had paid to get in. After a few weeks, someone figured out what the usher was doing and told Loew. He picked up his phone and twisted the knife: "Ed, you don't have to go to all that trouble. You can call up my house manager, and he will give you the box-office figures each day."

As late as 1927, the year of the first big sound film, *The Jazz Singer*, Marcus Loew still sounded eupeptic about vaudeville's fortunes. Invited to a Harvard seminar on movies, he spoke about the way he combined cinema and live performances at the State. Afterward he took questions:

> Q: Does a strong vaudeville act tend to bolster up a weak picture?
>
> A: A great name will help bolster up what is lacking in a picture.
>
> Q: Does broadcasting hurt your business any?
>
> A: Not at all. The only time radio hurts is when there is a big fight on or some other occasion that makes everybody stay home and listen in. That particular night we are hurt.
>
> Q: Is the Vitaphone going to cut into the vaudeville business in the near future?
>
> A: That is hard to say. I put that on a par with anything else that is new. Personally, I do not think that it is.

If the emergence of the "talkies" reduced the opportunities for vaudevillians, the Great Depression shrank them even more. Edward Albee, the tight-fisted Mr. Vaudeville for so many years, himself fell victim to a hostile takeover by the Kennedy founding father, Joseph P. Kennedy. Expert at outmaneuvering businessmen, Kennedy sold off the Keith circuit and used the income to create the RKO movie studio. Albee, with a big office and nothing to do, kept burdening his new boss with suggestions, until Kennedy finally snapped: "Ed, don't you know you're all through?" The deflated executive retired to Florida, and died in 1930.

Two years later, vaudeville made its own way to the cemetery, when the Palace Theater relinquished its identity. Novelist and vaudeville aficionado Sarah Addison was there: "On a certain evening in May a few hundred New Yorkers attended a wake. The rites were held at the Palace Theater; the corpse was Vaudeville, being shown for the last time in the last two-a-day, reserved-seat, non-film vaudeville house in America. The authorities are pretty well convinced that the corpse is permanently dead.

"The house was embarrassingly empty, the orchestra seats not half filled. There was no funeral oration and there were no tears. The performers were jolly, and the audience, scant as it was, was amused. Only a few lonely souls sat back in their seats mourning. Vaudeville, old-time, big-time vaudeville, had outlived its usefulness—the empty house certified to that—and its death carried no sting. The date was, incidentally, Friday the thirteenth."

Sophie Tucker agreed: "The movies have a death grip on vaudeville." And June Havoc, whose sister Gypsy Rose Lee became a headline stripper in burlesque, spoke for many colleagues: "Show business as I knew it had simply dwindled and vanished before my eyes. The happy island of vaudeville which had been my kindergarten, elementary and junior high school had sunk into the sea and left me treading water. . . . I was a displaced person."

Yet vaudeville has a lively ghost. From the late 1940s, when hardly anyone watched it, until the late 1960s, when almost everyone did, *The Ed Sullivan Show* carried on the vaudeville format on television, loading Sunday nights with pop singers and opera divas (the rarely seen Maria Callas performed an aria from *Tosca*) and a splendiferous variety of comedians, hoofers, singers, and performing seals. Like Flo Ziegfeld, who could neither sing, dance, nor play an instrument and yet produced the most enticing shows of his time, "Ed does nothing," Alan King quipped, "but he does it better than anyone else."

The public appetite for variety hasn't diminished. Stephen Sondheim recently described his newly revived collage of vignettes, *Pacific Overtures*, as "documentary vaudeville." Jay Leno, David Letterman, and Conan O'Brien, taking cues from predecessors Jack Paar and Johnny Carson, have welcomed many a comic, singer, dancer, and juggler, Palace-style, though we call these programs "talk shows." You could even argue that the most obvious manifestation of the ghost is not the stage musical or such retro films as *Chicago* but the battery-powered remote. It allows potatoes to choose from a cascade of entertainment without leaving their couches, just as yesteryear's audiences did by sitting back and placing themselves in the hands of Albee, Keith, and Ziegfeld. "If vaudeville is dead," observes writer Larry Gelbart (*M*A*S*H*), "television is the box they put it in." Requiescat in video.

(CURTAIN)

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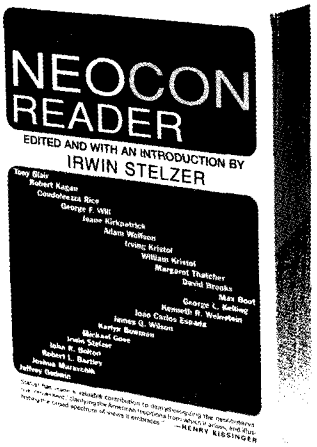

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Urbanities

Why Jon Stewart Is All the Rage

Harry Stein

To say Jon Stewart enjoys an adoring press is like saying Bill Gates has a few bucks. In story after glowing story, the boyish 42-year-old host of Comedy Central's hit fake newscast, *The Daily Show*, and author of the best-selling fake history text *America (The Book)* comes off as a lighthearted, twenty-first-century Diogenes: a fearless truth teller in an age of shameless pandering.

As *Newsweek* had it in a typically rapturous cover story, Stewart is a man "bravely battling pomposity and misinformation," his TV show "a fearless social satire" and a "work of genius." "When future historians come to write the political story of our times," intoned Bill Moyers on his recently ended PBS show, "they will first have to review hundreds of hours of a cable television program called *The Daily Show*. You simply can't understand American politics in the new millennium without *The Daily Show*." "Mr. Stewart has turned his parodistic TV news show into a cultural force significantly larger than any mere satire of media idiocies," chimed in the *New York Times*'s Frank Rich in a column entitled JON STEWART'S PERFECT PITCH, one of—count 'em—16 he's written lauding the comedian. Along with such over-the-top encomia, *The Daily Show* has won multiple Emmys and even several prestigious journalism prizes, including a Peabody Award and the Television Critics Association Award for Outstanding Achievement in News and Information (beating out real news shows).

While all this is certainly heady for Stewart and his fans, what does it mean? After all, the fair-minded viewer might find the half-hour show intermittently humorous, but he won't detect anything "fearless" or even especially original in it. In truth, Stewart's elevation to near-iconic status says more about those doing the elevating than about the comedian himself. His "bravery" and much-vaunted grasp of political nuance consists mostly of his embrace of every reflexive assumption shared by every litmus-tested liberal holding forth at every chic Manhattan dinner party.

Those assumptions cover everything from the Religious Right (scary) to easy sex (yummy), but Stewart's Number One obsession, like that of many of his fans, is President George W. Bush. Almost every major event Stewart deals with, foreign or domestic, is an excuse for Bush derision. Depending on the story at hand, the president is a reckless cowboy or a devious schemer, an inept fool or an immoral knave. Pressed, Stewart would probably be comfortable with all of the above. Often, Stewart will simply show a brief clip of the president speaking, then silently react, his look showing bewilderment or dismay, as his audience, their own contempt for all things Bush once again confirmed, erupts in laughter.

Certainly Stewart's timing could not have been better. When the former stand-up comic and MTV host took over *The Daily Show* in 1999, ditching its broader focus in favor of its now-famous ersatz news format, liberals were primed for a new comic hero.

As Laura Miller of the left-leaning webzine *Salon* explains, traditional political humor had long been the province of the Left, but "that all changed in the 1990s, when the priggishness of political correctitude injected new vitality into a segment of the population that had been shut out of comedy's pantheon: assholes"—by which she means conservatives. "Suddenly," Miller added sourly, "a guy could flaunt his most petty and vindictive prejudices and still get to feel like a champion of truth and freedom. You could rail against 'victimology' when, say, sexually harassed workers dared to resort to it, and then turn around and avail yourself of the same trend by claiming that a pack of censorious puritans was trying to shut you up."

For Miller and those like her, Stewart, with his smart and smirky persona, was an answer to all that—a *legitimate* champion of truth. When Bush was elected in 2000—or "selected," as so many on the Left insist—Stewart had his Great White Whale and surefire laugh machine all rolled into one. Angry and increasingly impotent, Stewart's fans, futilely seeking a sense of purpose, found in him at least a voice and an attitude. If liberals could do nothing about John Ashcroft and the Patriot Act, they could damn well hoot along with the studio audience at Jon Stewart's every derisive mention. *The Daily Show*'s ratings soared, especially among younger viewers, and media praise snowballed.

The press routinely portrays Stewart not merely as a gifted entertainer and social commentator but as an influential ideological player, a political pied piper for countless college kids and recent grads. The oft-cited evidence: a Pew Research Center survey, released during last year's bruising campaign, that showed 21 percent of Americans aged 18 to 29 naming *The Daily Show* and *Saturday Night Live* as their primary information sources on the presidential race. These numbers, not surprisingly, proved of great interest to liberal pols. John Edwards, for one, actually announced his presidential candidacy on *The Daily Show*, prompting Stewart to warn: "We are a fake show, so you might have to do this again somewhere."

BRUCE GILDEN/MAGNUM PHOTOS

It's a matter of attitude.

The tradition of liberal topical comedy that *Salon*'s Miller alludes to goes back at least to Lenny Bruce, but Stewart's most obvious model is the faux news anchor created by Chevy Chase in *Saturday Night Live*'s first season. Sitting behind his anchor desk—his soon-to-be-famous opening lines, "I'm Chevy Chase, and you're not," mocking the self-importance of real anchors—Chase created a character that has since become a cliché: the hip, ironic, ever-so-knowing newsman, offering a deadpan take on actual events, dropping coy references to sex, drugs, and rock 'n' roll as he amiably skewers the close-minded, the hypocritical, and the obtuse.

Stewart has smartly elaborated on the form. Shot four times a week before a wildly enthusiastic audience and broadcast twice a day, *The Daily Show* opens with its star at his anchor desk, giving his bemused take on the day's headlines, and it closes with Stewart engaging in traditional talk-show chitchat, sometimes with a newsmaker or serious thinker, just as often with a mid-level movie star. The show's middle segment, often the funniest part, usually features one of Stewart's "correspondents" reporting from "the field" (while actually standing mere feet away in the studio in front of a cheesy graphic) or bantering with the host as straight man.

When Stewart eschews knee-jerk partisanship, even many conservatives find his comic persona immensely appealing: a quick-witted, understated everyman, given to self-deprecation and let-the-chips-fall-where-they-may candor. This persona was much in evidence, for instance, in the 2004 commencement address he gave at William and Mary, his alma mater. "I am honored to be here and to receive this honorary doctorate," he told the graduates. "When I think back to the people that have been in this position before me, from Benjamin Franklin to Queen Noor of Jordan, I can't help but wonder what has happened to this place. Seriously, it saddens me," he continued. "As a person, I am honored to get it; as an alumnus, I have to say I believe we can do better. . . . But today isn't about how my presence here devalues this fine institution. It is about you, the graduates."

Stewart also effectively mobilizes this mock-serious tone in *America (The Book)*. Mimicking a typical high school history text, right down to the laminated cover and the "discussion questions" at the end of chapters—sample question for the media chapter: "What are the top 100 TV shows you would rather watch instead of the nightly news?"—the book is frequently laugh-out-loud funny. Among other riffs on convention, it features an introduction by Thomas Jefferson and a standings table, sports-page style, of European nations' war records. Named *Publishers Weekly*'s "Book of the Year," it topped the *New York Times* nonfiction bestseller list for 15 weeks, greatly expanding Stewart's reach.

At its best, *The Daily Show* takes the same poker-faced, out-of-left-field approach to subjects the real news takes seriously. Not long ago, for example, when the blogosphere's exposure of the biases of mainstream media figures had suddenly become *the* hot topic, correspondent Stephen Colbert weighed in. Tall, bespectacled, and impeccably groomed, full of the voice-of-God assurance we associate with generations of network reporters, Colbert wears any number of hats on the show: Senior Political Correspondent, Senior European Bureau Chief, Senior Religion Correspondent, and even—when waxing eloquent with academic fraudulence on Christo's installation *The Gates*—Senior Conceptual Art Correspondent. This time, as Senior Media Correspondent, he began his back-and-forth with Stewart with a shocking admission:

> *Colbert*: Jon, before we start, I'd like to get something off my chest, before I get outed by the bloggers. My real name isn't Stephen Colbert, it's Ted Hitler. No relation. [pause] Well, distant relation. . . . I'm Adolf Hitler's grandson. Anyway, it's out there, it's no longer news.
>
> *Stewart*: Uh . . . Thank you for your honesty, Stephen.
>
> *Colbert*: It's Ted. Ted Hitler. The vast majority of bloggers out there are responsible. . . . Where I draw the line is with these attack bloggers—just someone with a computer who gathers, collates, and publishes accurate information that is then read by the general public. They have no credibility, all they have is facts. Spare me!
>
> *Stewart*: As long as the blogs fact-check, why would you even object to this kind of political coverage?
>
> *Colbert*: Because it's not political coverage, Jon. They're reporting on reporters. First rule of journalism is: don't talk about journalism. Nobody likes a snitch.

Of course, *The Daily Show* talks about journalism—and journalists—all the time, another reason that media types swoon over it. Though much of what Stewart and his cronies say about the press is acidly contemptuous, even this plays to the bottomless narcissism of many journalists: if nothing else, Stewart reassures them that they remain at the center of the world.

More to the point, many reporters agree with the comic's harsh critique of the media, at least when it comes to coverage of the Bush administration and the Iraq War. Thus, startling as the charge may be to conservatives, media types delight when Stewart regularly accuses the press of giving the president a free pass. The exchange with Colbert about bloggers, for instance, works in the following:

> *Stewart*: What bloggers do, as you describe it, is

> in many respects what journalists do.
>
> *Colbert* [with rich contempt]: What journalists do, Jon? As a journalist, I think I know what I do. I'm not sitting at home in front of my computer. I'm out here busting my hump at the White House, transcribing their press releases, repeating their talking points—that's how you earn your nickname from President Bush!

"Our show is obviously at a disadvantage with any of the other news shows we're competing against," Stewart mused in another broadcast. "For one thing, we're fake. They are not. So in terms of credibility, we are . . . "—a beat, a patented Stewart blank look—"well, oddly enough, we're about even."

To Stewart and his crew, Iraq has long been "Mess O' Potamia," with even the best news spun as potentially disastrous. Immediately following the historic Iraqi elections, Stewart showed a chart of the incoming National Assembly, broken down by party. "The Shiites took 140 seats for their United Iraqi Alliance ticket," he explained, "followed by the Kurdistan—" An explosion blows up a good bit of the chart. "I guess," deadpanned Stewart, "there are still some bugs to work out in the electoral system." For those who viewed the Iraqi elections as a triumph of hope and humanity over evil, this reaction failed to amuse.

Stewart's profound cynicism about America as a bastion of freedom and democracy is at the core of *America (The Book)*. For all the genuine laughs, notes Megan Basham on *NationalReviewOnline*, the book makes abundantly clear "what a knuckle-dragging Philistine you are if you reflect on America the Beautiful with any sort of warm sentiment. . . . No aspect of our patriotic pride is too sacred to be sacrificed on the altar of irony." What's more, she continues, "If a conservative writing team ever penned a joke about a Democratic black leader like the one made by Stewart's team about Clarence Thomas (a mocking classroom activity in the book instructs children, 'Using felt and yarn, make a hand puppet of Clarence Thomas. Ta-da! You're Antonin Scalia!'), there would be p.r. hell to pay."

It speaks volumes about contemporary liberalism that in "progressive" circles, such stuff passes for brilliant satire.

Since Stewart's adamantly liberal worldview—which includes, among many, many other easy hits, regular slams of Fox News and mockery of traditionalist beliefs—is so central to his comedy, it's a bit odd to see his media fans always asserting that he's an equal-opportunity basher. The *New York Times*'s Rich, for example, writes, "*The Daily Show* has fulfilled its mission without being particularly ideological." Similarly, *Newsweek* presented a harmless gibe Stewart made at Democratic fringe presidential candidate Dennis Kucinich's expense as evidence of his supposed nonpartisanship. "Jon Stewart is allergic to liars, spinners, and boasters," the magazine gushed, "even pint-sized ones from Ohio." It then relates Stewart's joke: "I heard Dennis Kucinich in the last Democratic debate say, 'When I'm president . . . ' and I just wanted to stop him and say, '*Dude*.' "

Doubtless Kucinich was trading in unreality, but so do journalists who portray Stewart as ideologically neutral. While this might be construed as merely another case (as lyricist Lorenz Hart so deftly had it) of "the self-delusion that believes the lie"—a common enough tendency among today's media elite—it's surely also an effort to justify journalists' wild enthusiasm for the comedian. The truth, after all, plays less well: they love Jon Stewart not only because he's smart and "fearless" but because he shares their jaundiced views of America.

There's no more striking example of how big a part ideology plays in the mainstream media's taste in comedy than its about-face on Stewart's fellow comedian Dennis Miller. Making his bones as one of Chevy Chase's successors behind the *Saturday Night Live* "Weekend Update" anchor desk, Miller was long a media darling, praised like Stewart for inventiveness and daring, especially when he became host of his long-running HBO show, *Dennis Miller Live*. As the *New York Times*'s Caryn James wrote in 1996, Miller is "as scabrous and funny a political satirist as anyone around," given to "irreverent comments on the news."

That's when Miller was a man of the Left. Then, after September 11, in a metamorphosis both startling and brave, given the world in which he made his living, Miller emerged as an outspoken defender of Bush's foreign policy. Instantly, he became the skunk at the media party. In 2004, hosting a new show on CNBC, he found himself dismissed by the very same Caryn James as one of "the stand-up comics turned pontificating policy wonks." To her colleague Rich, he was simply "formerly funny."

Jon Stewart is in no danger of such treatment anytime soon. Though to his credit, Stewart sometimes invites conservatives like *Weekly Standard* editor Bill Kristol for the show's concluding interview segment (and treats them with good-humored civility), his warmest interviews are with guests whose liberal views mirror his own. The *New Yorker*'s Seymour Hersh, arguably the mainstream media's most dogged anti-Bush reporter, is a particular favorite. On a recent Hersh appearance, promoting a piece that alleged, dubiously, that Bush is spoiling for war with Iran, the host introduced him with something approaching awe—"He does a thing called *real reporting*"—and went on to embrace Hersh's every sour observation and unsubstantiated conclusion.

It's hardly a coincidence that, as the Swift Boat Veterans' attack threatened to sink John Kerry's campaign in the fall of 2004, raising questions about his Vietnam record and antiwar activities when he returned from combat, the candidate chose *The Daily Show* as the venue from which to respond. In what can only be described as a classic suck-up session, Stewart began: "Now how—how are you holding up? This has been a—it's been a rough couple weeks. I've been following—I watch a lot of the cable news shows. So I understand that apparently you were never in Vietnam [laughs]."

> *Kerry*: [laughs] That's what I understand, too. But I—I'm trying to find out what happened.
>
> *Stewart*: Now is it—
>
> *Kerry*: That part of my life. I don't know.
>
> *Stewart*: Exactly. It's nice, though. I know—35 years ago I have friends that have come forward and say—you did have cooties. You know, that sort of thing [laughs]. Is it—do you—do you—is it hard not to take it personally?

Responding later to criticism about a line of questioning so soft it hardly qualified as questioning at all, Stewart blithely noted, as he always does in such situations, that he is merely a comedian, not a journalist.

Fair enough, except that no one takes Stewart—nor does he really take himself—for another Jay Leno. Citing the Pew numbers, many observers maintained he would deliver his young audience en masse to the Democrats, helping propel Kerry to victory. Fox News's Bill O'Reilly, for instance, warned darkly of Stewart's hold on the vast, untapped "stoned slacker" vote.

The thinking here was understandable. It is safe to say that the vast majority of Stewart's young fans have no more a coherent political philosophy than they do a sense of history. What they do tend to have, in the contemporary vernacular, is *attitude*: a set of poses, ranging from an easy familiarity with drug culture to a bemused contempt for religion, that define one as hip. Jon Stewart confirms that view of themselves in every broadcast.

Still, it's hard precisely to gauge what kind of influence, if any, Stewart ultimately had on the 2004 election. As it turned out, Bush did about as well with younger voters as he did in 2000—winning about 45 percent of the total—and 18- to 29-year-olds made up the same percentage of the total turnout as they had four years earlier.

What's beyond a doubt is how much emotion the comedian himself had invested in the election's outcome. The *New York Daily News* notes that Stewart was "in a real bad mood" on election night, cutting out after spending only a few minutes at *The Daily Show*'s election party. His next show was uncharacteristically bitter. Typifying the half-hour's tenor was a rant by Lewis Black, easily the nastiest of the show's regular crew: "The electorate has spoken," he growled. "I won't try to imitate out of respect for the mentally retarded."

Nor is there any doubt about Stewart's continuing influence on the elite media. Consider his height-of-the-election appearance on CNN's long-running political debate program, *Crossfire*. Stewart supposedly was there to hawk his book, and the segment began with conservative co-host Tucker Carlson amiably introducing the comedian as "the most trusted name in fake news," a man with a "one-of-a-kind take on politics, the press, and America." But a humorless Stewart—in liberal high dudgeon—almost immediately launched into an attack on the program and its hosts for purported journalistic failures. With its heat-over-light confrontational format, *Crossfire* was "hurting America," Stewart charged. Hosts Carlson and liberal Paul Begala were guilty of "partisan hackery."

The befuddled hosts at first tried to jolly Stewart into being the good-natured guest they'd expected. But finally, Carlson had enough, and brought up Stewart's toothless interview with Kerry. "If you want to compare your show to a comedy show," shot back Stewart, "you're more than welcome to."

The *Crossfire* audience cheered Stewart, but not nearly as much as the mainstream press did. "Hosts of CNN's *Crossfire* had expected their Friday guest to be the zany and sophisticated satirist Jon Stewart, host of Comedy Central's popular *The Daily Show*," as the *Los Angeles Times* spun it. "Instead, they got Citizen Stewart, a passionate and earnest media watchdog who snarled and begged them to 'stop hurting America.' "

Yet even Stewart must have been surprised by what happened next. Incoming CNN president Jonathan Klein fired Carlson and announced that the network would cancel the near-moribund *Crossfire*. "I guess I come down more firmly in the Jon Stewart camp," he told the Associated Press.

Soon after, when the Memogate scandal forced CBS anchor Dan Rather into early retirement, there was actually speculation that the network would offer comic Stewart a prominent role in a revamped nightly news broadcast. Perhaps sensing that joining the CBS News team wouldn't be an upward career move, Stewart used his show to quash the rumors. "Can this loser network ever pull itself out of the crapper?" intoned one of its phony correspondents. "They've floated all kinds of names to replace Dan Rather, from Katie Couric to"—as a photo of a mugging Stewart appeared on the screen—"Douchebag McJokenstein."

It is awfully hard in this age of celebrity preening to dislike a guy who so readily pokes fun at himself. Still, it's hardly as if taking shots at CBS these days qualifies Stewart as a risk-taker.

He appeared to be making a far bolder move a couple of months later when, with the democratic tide rising in the Middle East, he acknowledged that maybe Bush's policy in the region hadn't been so loony after all. He admitted that such a thought left him full of "cognitive dissonance," but "when you see the Lebanese in the streets, you say, 'Oh my God, it's working!' "

"[P]retty soon, Republicans are gonna be like, 'Reagan was nothing compared to this guy,' " Stewart added, cradling his head in his hands. "Like, my kid's gonna go to a high school named after him, I just know it."

"Well," comforted his guest, a die-hard former Clinton official, "there's still Iran and North Korea, don't forget."

"Iran and North Korea," echoed Stewart hopefully, as he thrust crossed fingers up in the air for luck. "That's true, that is true."

At least somewhat reassured, his audience roared. ■

Oh, to ngland

The Roads to Serfdom

Theodore Dalrymple

People in Britain who lived through World War II do not remember it with anything like the horror one might have expected. In fact, they often remember it as the best time of their lives. Even allowing for the tendency of time to burnish unpleasant memories with a patina of romance, this is extraordinary. The war, after all, was a time of material shortage, terror, and loss: what could possibly have been good about it?

The answer, of course, is that it provided a powerful existential meaning and purpose. The population suffered at the hands of an easily identifiable external enemy, whose evil intentions it became the overriding purpose of the whole nation to thwart. A unified and preeminent national goal provided respite from the peacetime cacophony of complaint, bickering, and social division. And privation for a purpose brings its own content.

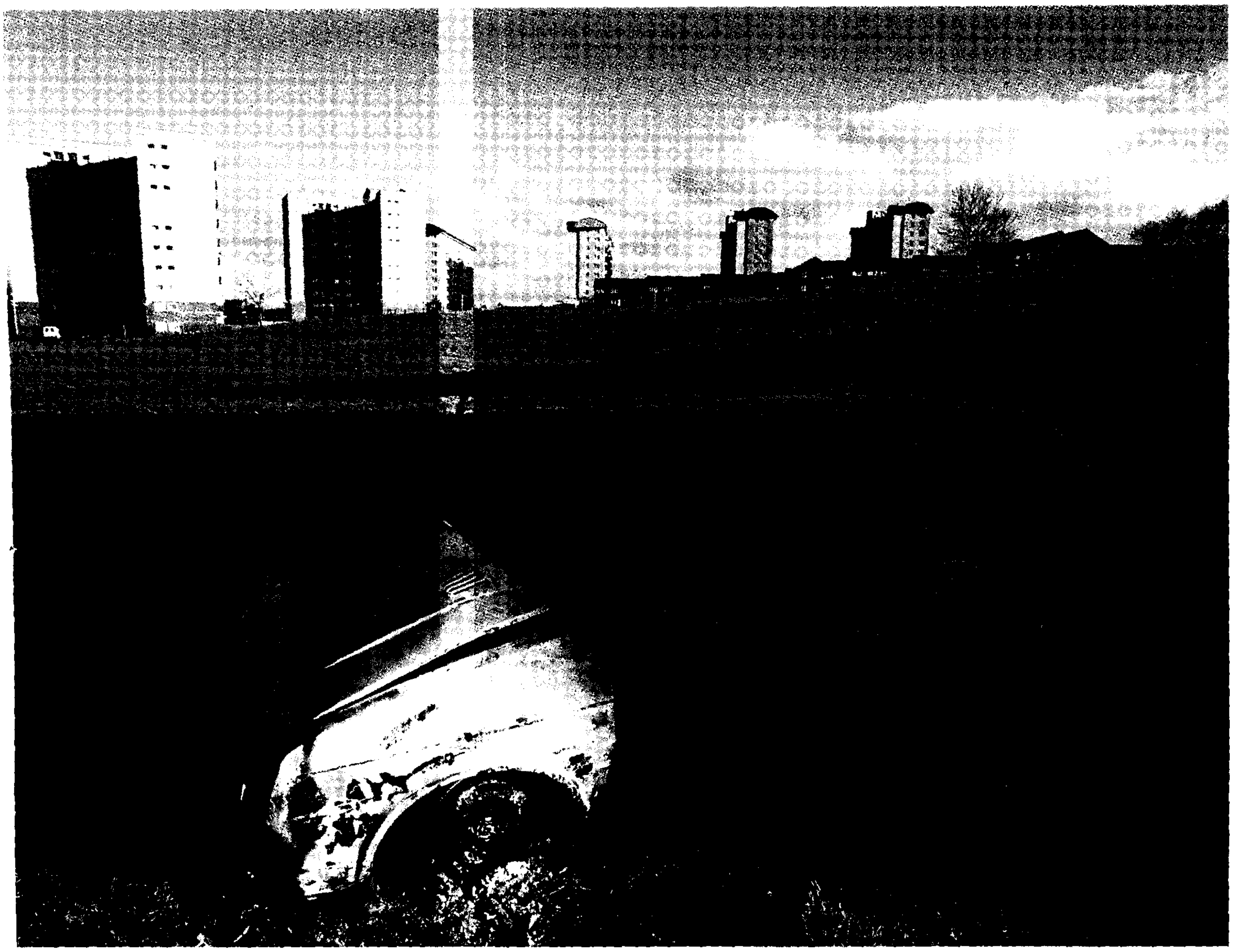
The war having instantaneously created a nostalgia for the sense of unity and transcendent purpose that prevailed in those years, the population naturally enough asked why such a mood could not persist into the peace that followed. Why couldn't the dedication of millions, centrally coordinated by the government—a coordinated dedication that had produced unprecedented quantities of aircraft and munitions—be adapted to defeat what London School of Economics head Sir William Beveridge, in his wartime report on social services that was to usher in the full-scale welfare state in Britain, called the "five giants on the road to reconstruction": Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor, and Idleness?

By the time Beveridge published his report in 1942, most of the intellectuals of the day assumed that the government, and only the government, could accomplish these desirable goals. Indeed, it all seemed so simple a matter that only the cupidity and stupidity of the rich could have prevented these ends from already having been achieved. The Beveridge Report states, for example, that want "could have been abolished in Britain before the present war" and that "the income available to the British people was ample for such a purpose." It was just a matter of dividing the national income cake into more equal slices by means of redistributive taxation. If the political will was there, the way was there; there was no need to worry about effects on wealth creation or any other adverse effects.

For George Orwell, writing a year before the Beveridge Report, matters were equally straightforward. "Socialism," he wrote, "is usually defined as 'common ownership of the means of production.' Crudely: the State, representing the whole nation, owns everything, and everyone is a state employee. . . . Socialism . . . can solve the problems of production and consumption. . . . The State simply calculates what goods will be needed and does its best to produce them. Production is only limited by the amount of labour and raw materials."

A few, equally simple measures would help bring about a better, more just and equitable society. Orwell recommended "i) Nationalization of land, mines, railways, banks and major industries"; "ii) Limitation of incomes, on such a scale that the highest does not exceed the lowest by more than ten to one"; and "iii) Reform of the educational system along democratic lines." By this last, he meant the total prohibition of private education. He assumed that the culture, which he esteemed but which nevertheless was a product of the very system he so disliked, would take care of itself.

It would hardly be an exaggeration to say that, by the time Orwell wrote, his collectivist philosophy was an intellectual orthodoxy from which hardly anyone in Britain would dare dissent, at least very strongly. "We are all socialists now," declared Bernard Shaw 40 years before Orwell put forward his modest proposals. And before him, Oscar Wilde, in "The Soul of Man under Socialism," accepted as incontrovertible—as not even worth supporting with evidence or argument, so obviously true was it—that poverty was the inescapable consequence of



The embodiment of the collectivist ideal

private property, and that one man's wealth was another man's destitution. And before Wilde, John Ruskin had argued, in *Unto This Last,* that a market in labor was both unnecessary and productive of misery. After all, he said, many wages were set according to an abstract (which is to say a moral) conception of the value of the job; so why should not all wages be set in the same way? Would this not avoid the unjust, irrational, and frequently harsh variations to which a labor market exposed people?

Ruskin was right that there are indeed jobs whose wages are fixed by an approximate notion of moral appropriateness. The salary of the president of the United States is not set according to the vagaries of the labor market; nor would the number of candidates for the post change much if it were halved or doubled. But if every wage in the United States were fixed in the same way, wages would soon cease to mean very much. The economy would be demonetized, the impersonal medium of money being replaced in the allocation of goods and services by personal influence and political connection—precisely what happened in the Soviet Union. Every economic transaction would become an expression of political power.

The growing spirit of collectivism in Britain during the war provoked an Austrian economist who had taken refuge there, F. A. von Hayek, to write a polemical counterblast to the trend: *The Road to Serfdom*, published in 1944. It went through six printings in its first year, but its effect on majority opinion was, for many years to come, negligible. Hayek believed that while intellectuals in modern liberal democracies—those to whom he somewhat contemptuously referred as the professional secondhand dealers in ideas—did not usually have direct access to power, the theories that they diffused among the population ultimately had a profound, even determining, influence upon their society. Intellectuals are of far greater importance than appears at first sight.

Hayek was therefore alarmed at the general acceptance of collectivist arguments—or worse still, assumptions—by British intellectuals of all classes. He had seen the process—or thought he had seen it—before, in the German-speaking world from which he came, and he feared that Britain would likewise slide down the totalitarian path. Moreover, at the time he wrote, the "success" of the two major totalitarian powers in Europe, Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, seemed to have justified the belief that a plan was necessary to coordinate human activity toward a consciously chosen goal. For George Orwell, the difference between the two tyrannies was one of ends, not of means: he held up Nazi Germany as an exemplar of economic efficiency resulting from central planning, but he deplored the ends that efficiency accomplished. While the idea behind Nazism was "human inequality, the superiority of Germans to all other races, the right of Germany to rule the world," socialism (of which, of course, the Soviet Union was the only exemplar at the time) "aims, ultimately, at a world-state of free and equal human beings." Same means, different ends: but Orwell, at this point in his intellectual development, saw nothing intrinsically objectionable in the means themselves, or that they must inevitably lead to tyranny and oppression, independently of the ends for which they were deployed.

Against the collectivists, Hayek brought powerful—and to my mind obvious—arguments, that, however, were scarcely new or original. Nevertheless, it is often, perhaps usually, more important to remind people of old truths than to introduce them to new ones.

Hayek pointed out that the wartime unity of purpose was atypical; in more normal times, people had a far greater, indeed an infinite, variety of ends, and anyone with the power to adjudicate among them in the name of a conscious overall national plan, allowing a few but forbidding most, would exert vastly more power than the most bloated plutocrat of socialist propaganda had ever done in a free-market society.

Orwell's assertion that the state would simply calculate what was needed airily overlooked the difficulties of the matter, as well as his proposal's implications for freedom. The "directing brains," as Orwell called them, would have to decide how many hairpins, how many shoelaces, were "needed" by the population under their purview. They would have to make untold millions of such decisions, likewise coordinating the production of all components of each product, on the basis of their own arbitrary notions of what their fellow citizens needed. Orwell's goal, therefore, was a society in which the authorities strictly rationed everything; for him, and untold intellectuals like him, only rationing was rational. It takes little effort of the imagination to see what this control would mean for the exercise of liberty. Among other things, people would have to be assigned work regardless of their own preferences.

Collectivist thinking arose, according to Hayek, from impatience, a lack of historical perspective, and an arrogant belief that, because we have made so much technological progress, everything must be susceptible to human control. While we take material advance for granted as soon as it occurs, we consider remaining social problems as unprecedented and anomalous, and we propose solutions that actually make more difficult further progress of the very kind that we have forgotten ever happened. While everyone saw the misery the Great Depression caused, for example, few realized that, even so, living standards actually continued to rise for the majority. If we live entirely in the moment, as if the world were created exactly as we now find it, we are almost bound to propose solutions that bring even worse problems in their wake.

In reaction to the unemployment rampant in what W. H. Auden called "the low dishonest decade" before the war, the Beveridge Report suggested that it was government's function to maximize security of income and employment. This proposition was bound to appeal strongly to people who remembered mass unemployment and collapsing wages; but however high-minded and generous it might have sounded, it was wrong. Hayek pointed out that you can't give everyone a job irrespective of demand without sparking severe inflation. And you can no more protect one group of workers' wages against market fluctuations without penalizing another group than you can discriminate positively in one group's favor without discriminating negatively against another. This is so, and it is beyond any individual human's control that it should be so. Therefore, no amount of planning would ever make Beveridge's goals possible, however desirable they might be in the abstract.

But just because a goal is logically impossible to achieve does not mean that it must be without effect on human affairs. As the history of the twentieth century demonstrates perhaps better than any other, impossible goals have had at least as great an effect on human existence as more limited and possible ones.

The most interesting aspect of Hayek's book, however, is not his refutation of collectivist ideas—which, necessary as it might have been at that moment, was not by any means original. Rather, it is his observations of the moral and psychological effects of the collectivist ideal that, 60 years later, capture the imagination—mine, at least.

Hayek thought he had observed an important change in the character of the British people, as a result both of their collectivist aspirations and of such collectivist measures as had already been legislated. He noted, for example, a shift in the locus of people's moral concern. Increasingly, it was the state of society or the world as a whole that engaged their moral passion, not their own conduct. "It is, however, more than doubtful whether a fifty years' approach towards collectivism has raised our moral standards, or whether the change has not rather been in the opposite direction," he wrote. "Though we are in the habit of priding ourselves on our more sensitive social conscience, it is by no means clear that this is justified by the practice of our individual conduct." In fact, "It may even be . . . that the passion for collective action is a way in which we now without compunction collectively indulge in that selfishness which as individuals we had learnt a little to restrain."

Thus, to take a trifling instance, it is the duty of the city council to keep the streets clean; therefore my own conduct in this regard is morally irrelevant—which no doubt explains why so many young Britons now leave a trail of litter behind them wherever they go. If the streets are filthy, it is the council's fault. Indeed, if anything is wrong—for example, my unhealthy diet—it is someone else's fault, and the job of the public power to correct.

Hayek—with the perspective of a foreigner who had adopted England as his home—could perceive a further tendency that has become much more pronounced since then: "There is one aspect of the change in moral values brought about by the advance of collectivism which at the present time provides special food for thought. It is that the virtues which are held less and less in esteem and which consequently become rarer are precisely those on which the British people justly prided themselves and in which they were generally agreed to excel. The virtues possessed by the British people in a higher degree than most other people . . . were independence and self-reliance, individual initiative and local responsibility . . . non-interference with one's neighbour and tolerance of the different and queer, respect for custom and tradition, and a healthy suspicion of power and authority."

He might have added the sense of irony, and therefore of the inherent limitations of human existence, that was once so prevalent, and that once protected the British population from infatuation with utopian dreams and unrealistic expectations. And the virtues that Hayek saw in them—the virtues immortalized in the pages of Jane Austen and Charles Dickens—were precisely the virtues that my mother and her cousin also saw when they first arrived in Britain as refugees from Germany in 1938. Orwell saw (and valued) them, too, but unlike Hayek did not ask himself where they came from; he must have supposed that they were an indestructible national essence, distilled not from history but from geography.

The British are sadly changed from Hayek's description of them. A sense of irony is the first victim of utopian dreams. The British tolerance of eccentricity has also evaporated; uniformity is what they want now, and are prepared informally to impose. They tolerate no deviation in taste or appearance from themselves: and certainly in the lower reaches of society, people who are markedly different, either in appearance because of the vagaries of nature, or in behavior because of an unusual taste they may have, especially for cultivation, meet with merciless ridicule, bullying, and even physical attack. It is as if people believed that uniformity of appearance, taste, and behavior were a justification of their own lives, and any deviation an implied reproach or even a declaration of hostility. A young patient of mine, who disliked the noise, the vulgarity, and the undertone of violence of the nightclubs where her classmates spent their Friday and Saturday nights, was derided and mocked into conformity: it was too hard to hold out. The pressure to conform to the canons of popular taste—or rather lack of taste—has never been stronger. Those without interest in soccer hardly dare mention it in public, for fear of being considered enemies of the people. A dispiriting uniformity of character, deeply shallow, has settled over a land once richer in eccentrics than any other. No more Edward Lears for us: we prefer notoriety to oddity now.

The British are no longer sturdily independent as individuals, either, and now feel no shame or even unease, as not long ago they would have felt, at accepting government handouts. Indeed, 40 percent of them now receive such handouts: for example, the parents of every child are entitled not merely to a tax reduction but to an actual payment in cash, no matter the state of their finances. As for those who, though able-bodied and perfectly able to work, are completely dependent on the state for their income, they unashamedly call the day when their welfare checks arrive "payday." Between work and parasitism they see no difference. "I'm getting paid today," they say, having not only accepted but thoroughly internalized the doctrine propounded in the Beveridge Report, that it is the duty of the state to assure everyone of a decent minimum standard of life regardless of his conduct. The fact of having drawn 16 breaths a minute, 24 hours a day, is sufficient to entitle each of them to his minimum; and oddly enough, Hayek saw no danger in this and even endorsed the idea. He did not see that to guarantee a decent minimum standard of life would demoralize not only those who accepted it, but those who worked in the more menial occupations, and whose wages would almost inevitably give them a standard of living scarcely higher than that of the decent minimum provided merely for drawing breath.

In any case, Hayek did not quite understand the source of the collectivist rot in Britain. It is true, of course, that an individualist society needs a free, or at least a free-ish, market; but a necessary condition is not a sufficient one. It is not surprising, though, that he should have emphasized the danger of a centrally planned economy when so prominent a figure as Orwell—who was a genuine friend of personal liberty, who valued the peculiarities of English life, and who wrote movingly about such national eccentricities as a taste for racy seaside postcards and a love of public school stories—should so little have understood the preconditions of English personal liberty that he wrote, only three years before Hayek's book was published: "The liberty of the individual is still believed in, almost as in the nineteenth century. But this has nothing to do with economic liberty, the right to exploit others for profit."

It is depressing to see a man like Orwell equating profit with exploitation. And it is certainly true that Britain after the war took no heed of Hayek and for a time seemed bent on state control of what were then called "the commanding heights of the economy." Not only did the Labour government nationalize health care, but also coal mining, electricity and gas supply, the railways and public transportation (including the airlines), telecommunications, and even most of the car industry. Yet at no time could it remotely be said that Britain was slipping down the totalitarian path.

The real danger was far more insidious, and Hayek incompletely understood it. The destruction of the British character did not come from Nazi- or Soviet-style nationalization or centralized planning, as Hayek believed it would. For collectivism proved to be not nearly as incompatible with, or diametrically opposed to, a free, or free-ish, market as he had supposed.

In fact, Hilaire Belloc, in his book *The Servile State*, predicted just such a form of collectivism as early as 1912. Like most intellectuals of the age, Belloc was a critic of capitalism, because he held it responsible for the poverty and misery he saw in the London slums. His view was static, not dynamic: he did not see that the striving there could—and would—lift people out of their poverty, and he therefore argued that the liberal, laissez-faire state—"mere capitalist anarchy," he called it—could not, and should not, continue. He foresaw three possible outcomes.

His preferred resolution was more or less the same as Carlyle's half a century earlier: a return to the allegedly stable and happy medieval world of reciprocal rights and duties. There would be guilds of craftsmen and merchants in the towns, supplying mainly handmade goods to one another and to peasant farmers, who in turn would supply them with food. Everyone would own at least some property, thereby having a measure of independence, but no one would be either plutocrat or pauper. However desirable this resolution, though, even Belloc knew it was fantasy.

The second possible resolution was the socialist one: total expropriation of the means of production, followed by state ownership, allegedly administered in the interests of everyone. Belloc had little to say on whether he thought this would work, since in his opinion it was unlikely to happen: the current owners of the means of production were still far too strong.

That left the third, and most likely, resolution. The effect of collectivist thought on a capitalist society would not be socialism, but something quite distinct, whose outlines he believed he discerned in the newly established compulsory unemployment insurance. The means of production would remain in private hands, but the state would offer workers certain benefits, in return for their quiescence and agreement not to agitate for total expropriation as demanded in socialist propaganda.

Unlike Orwell or Beveridge, however, he realized that such benefits would exact a further price: "A man has been compelled by law to put aside sums from his wages as insurance against unemployment. But he is no longer the judge of how such sums shall be used. They are not in his possession; they are not even in the hands of some society which he can really control. They are in the hands of a Government official. 'Here is work offered to you at twenty-five shillings a week. If you do not take it you shall certainly not have a right to the money you have been compelled to put aside. If you will take it the sum shall stand to your credit, and when next in my judgment your unemployment is not due to your recalcitrance and refusal to labour, I will permit you to have some of your money; not otherwise.' "

What applied to unemployment insurance would apply to all other spheres into which government intruded, Belloc intuited; and all of the benefits government conferred, paid for by the compulsory contributions of the taxpayer, in effect would take choice and decision making out of the hands of the individual, placing them in those of the official. Although the benefits offered by the government were as yet few when Belloc wrote, he foresaw a state in which the "whole of labour is mapped out and controlled." In his view, "The future of industrial society, and in particular of English society . . . is a future in which subsistence and security shall be guaranteed for the Proletariat, but shall be guaranteed . . . by the establishment of that Proletariat in a status really, though not nominally, servile." The people lose "that tradition of . . . freedom, and are most powerfully inclined to [the] acceptance of [their servile status] by the positive benefits it confers."

And this is precisely what has happened to the large proportion of the British population that has been made dependent on the welfare state.

The state action that was supposed to lead to the elimination of Beveridge's five giants of Want, Disease, Ignorance, Squalor, and Idleness has left many people in contemporary Britain with very little of importance to decide for themselves, even in their own private spheres. They are educated by the state (at least nominally), as are their children in turn; the state provides for them in old age and has made saving unnecessary or, in some cases, actually uneconomic; they are treated and cured by the state when they are ill; they are housed by the state, if they cannot otherwise afford decent housing. Their choices concern only sex and shopping.

No wonder that the British have changed in character, their sturdy independence replaced with passivity, querulousness, or even, at the lower reaches of society, a sullen resentment that not enough has been or is being done for them. For those at the bottom, such money as they receive is, in effect, pocket money, like the money children get from their parents, reserved for the satisfaction of whims. As a result, they are infantilized. If they behave irresponsibly—for example, by abandoning their own children wherever they father them—it is because both the rewards for behaving responsibly and the penalties for behaving irresponsibly have vanished. Such people come to live in a limbo, in which there is nothing much to hope or strive for and nothing much to fear or lose.

Private property and consumerism coexist with collectivism, and freedom for many people now means little more than choice among goods. The free market, as Hayek did not foresee, has flourished alongside the collectivism that was—and, after years of propaganda, still is—justified by the need to eliminate the five giants. For most of the British population today, the notion that people could solve many of the problems of society without governmental *Gleichschaltung*, the Nazi term for overall coordination, is completely alien.

Of course, the majority of Britons are still not direct dependents of the state. "Only" about a third of them are: the 25 percent of the working population who are public employees (the government has increased them by nearly 1 million since 1997, no doubt in order to boost its election chances); and the 8 percent of the adult population either unemployed or registered as disabled, and thus utterly dependent on government handouts. But the state looms large in all our lives, not only in its intrusions, but in our thoughts: for so thoroughly have we drunk at the wells of collectivism that we see the state always as the solution to any problem, never as an obstacle to be overcome.

One can gauge how completely collectivism has entered our soul—so that we are now a people of the government, for the government, by the government—by a strange but characteristic British locution. When, on the rare occasions that our Chancellor of the Exchequer reduces a tax, he is said to have "given money away." In other words, all money is his, and whatever we have in our pockets is what he, by grace and favor, has allowed us.

Our Father, which art in Downing Street. . . .

Letters

Justifying Torture?

To the editor:

Heather Mac Donald manages to admit that water-boarding is torture, but the rest of "How to Interrogate Terrorists" [Winter 2005] is an extended apologia for prisoner abuse.

Mac Donald neglects to mention the accounts of beatings and other abuses during interrogation recently uncovered in Iraq in the widening scandal there; or the FBI accounts of torture at Guantánamo—prisoners chained for a day, covered in their own waste. Perhaps we should not expect her to illuminate such practices, but to excuse them—praising them with faint damns, as it were.

Mac Donald is disdainful of the "self-professed guardians of human rights"—the ACLU, the Red Cross, and Amnesty International. These organizations are often attacked by people who prefer their torture discreet. Perhaps Mac Donald should think about the company she keeps when she insults their work.

Scott MacEachern
Via e-mail

To the editor:

Heather Mac Donald reaches conclusions similar to those in Roger Trinquier's *Modern Warfare: A French View of Counterinsurgency*. Trinquier concluded that the current paradigm of holding citizens accountable to their nation's laws and soldiers accountable to the Geneva conventions does not allow nations to address adequately the nature of terrorists, their capture, and their subsequent exploitation for time-sensitive information. Fortunately, Mac Donald does not follow Trinquier's slippery slope of justifying torture—where unsupervised interrogators "must force [the terrorist's] secret from him"—but rather suggests that there is some ground between the Geneva conventions, protection of fundamental human rights, and Trinquier's position.

Reasonable people will disagree on a topic as difficult as this one; I hope future discussion will include the points Heather Mac Donald raises.

Chuck Hensley
Via e-mail

To the editor:

I must congratulate Heather Mac Donald. As an army interrogator who worked at Gitmo, I know what went on there—and she got it exactly right. I hand out her article to all the people who ask me about what it was like to live and work there.

Finally, a journalist who gets it.

SSG Lara Scarpato
Fayetteville, NC

To the editor:

Heather Mac Donald's conclusion seems to be that it's okay to be Nazis if we're fighting Nazis. If America can no longer claim the moral high ground—surrendered in the past 50 years by a series of administrations driven by realpolitik—then we are no better than Nazis, and we should stop hypocritically claiming that America is a force for good and own up to our lack of moral legitimacy.

Via e-mail
Name withheld

Heather Mac Donald responds: U.S. soldiers have abused prisoners in the war on terror, as my article makes absolutely clear, but the incidence of such abuse has been low. As of September 2004, the Pentagon had substantiated 70 cases of abuse in Afghanistan, Cuba, and Iraq—about .01 percent of all detainees. Of those cases, only 20 were in any way associated with interrogation—or .04 percent of all detainees. The most common form of abuse was physical assault; the second most common, threats. I don't know what the "recently uncovered" accounts are of beatings in Iraq to which Mr. MacEachern refers, but all such beatings in Iraq and elsewhere were clear violations of interrogation rules and had nothing to do with interrogation policy. They resulted, rather, from the inexcusable breakdown of military discipline during the insurgency.

The FBI regards any form of stress interrogation—such as marathon interrogation sessions that keep a prisoner up past his bedtime—as abuse. Tensions and bad blood between FBI agents and military intelligence at Guantánamo were, for that reason, high. One memo from a disgruntled FBI agent at Guantánamo referred to such stress techniques as "torture"; but calling them torture does not make them so. If the FBI memo alleging that a prisoner had been kept in shackles for 24 hours proves accurate, such treatment might well constitute abuse—if there were no security reasons for it. But high-security prisons in the U.S. shackle violent

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prisoners. And Guantánamo detainees are hardly lambs: they create weapons out of every possible object and regularly try to assault guards. Shackling in this particular case may have been gratuitous and culpable cruelty; it may also have been a lawful security measure.

I will lose my disdain for the ACLU and Amnesty International when they start telling the truth about the war on terror. The Red Cross has exercised a double standard over the last four decades regarding prisoner abuse (essentially ignoring American POWs in Vietnam, for example); but the failure of Abu Ghraib prison officials to heed its warnings was a clear mistake.

The 6 million innocent victims of Nazi atrocities are tragically not able to answer the question, but if offered the choice between detention at Guantánamo—where 600 suspected terrorists are given Red Cross visits, cutting-edge medical treatment, exercise, three meals a day, copies of the Qu'ran, the opportunity to pray five times a day, Pentagon bureaucrats second-guessing every decision made by guards and intelligence officers so as to ensure humane conditions, and ocean views—on the one hand, and detention at Buchenwald on the other, they would certainly choose the former.

Does Policing Matter?

To the editor:

I write to take issue not with anything written in E. J. McMahon's "New York Crime Hits a Tipping Point" [Winter 2005] but rather with what is omitted. The Giuliani crackdown led to an exodus of New York criminals—not to prisons, but to other East Coast cities. Having seen the increase in my jurisdiction of offenders who report their place of birth as New York, I now know where Gotham's criminals have gone. I have sat in meetings where shortsighted administrators conclude that the best response is to drive criminals out of our area, not recognizing that we are experiencing the results of those same policies being previously implemented elsewhere. These efforts probably are best compared to the carnival game "Whack-a Mole."

A new jurisdiction won't recognize right away that the "mole" has popped up in its hole, and a lot of damage can be wrought in the interim. More comprehensive efforts to identify and incapacitate career criminals, and to hold accountable those in the criminal justice system who fail to do this, are the only truly effective way to bring about the tipping point, not pushing the weights onto someone else's scale.

Patrick Cronin
Via e-mail

To the editor:

While I would agree that the changes E. J. McMahon describes are indeed "spectacular," to attribute them to "improved policing strategies" is laughable. Crime was declining similarly throughout the country during that same period of time, due to the aging of the population—a trend that criminologists predicted years ago. Moreover, there is nothing that the NYPD (or any PD) could have done to effect these types of changes in real time. If the police could do anything about crime rates (which the literature proves highly doubtful), it would take several years—probably a decade or more—even to notice. Let's give credit where credit is due: the "aging-out" phenomenon. It's a historical accident really, and you'd better be ready for the "echo boom" to come!

William T. Prince, MS, CPP
Via e-mail

E. J. McMahon responds:

Well, what do you know? Despite all the evidence to the contrary—not to mention the lived experience of millions of New Yorkers, and the testimony of law enforcement professionals like Mr. Cronin—someone out there still thinks that policing can't affect crime rates.

Sure, demographics have some influence on both crime and imprisonment rates, as my piece acknowledged. But anyone who thinks strategies like Compstat don't matter simply hasn't been paying attention. Mr. Prince either overlooked or chose to ignore our "Crime Rates" chart, which showed index crimes dropping much more steeply in New York than in the nation as a whole between 1988 and 2003. No other major city did nearly as much to reduce crime rates during this period; indeed, as of 2004, New York was *still* reducing crime at a significantly greater rate than the national average.

It's Mr. Prince and his determinist viewpoint that deserve the label "laughable"—as in laughably out-of-date.

Intelligence and Scholarship

To the editor:

Brian C. Anderson's "On Campus, Conservatives Talk Back" [Winter 2005] succeeds in proving exactly the opposite of what it proposes. A vast right-wing apparatus of foundations, institutes, and wealthy individuals—none of whom have any organic relationship to the university—provides comfort food for the conservative afflicted on campus. "Independent" student newspapers depend totally on funding from organizations that would withdraw their support should the student editor venture a thought at variance with the party line.

Against this array of wealth and power, Anderson describes a few quirky professors. It must be admitted: a plurality of professors lean to the left. That's a product of both intelligence and scholarship. But the Left consists of a thousand and one different viewpoints, while Mr. Anderson's Right is a monolithic beast fearful of exposure to a variant argument.

Herbert Greenhut
The Bronx, NY

To the editor:

Thank God for the weakening liberal stranglehold on college campuses, which hopefully will continue.

NORTH INTERIOR VIEW OF THE NEW YORK POST OFFICE,
John Lorimer Graham Esq. Postmaster.

COLLECTION OF THE NEW-YORK HISTORICAL SOCIETY, NEGATIVE # 44867

I'm a sophomore at Louisiana State University, and the campus is like an island of liberalism in Baton Rouge's conservative sea. Keep in mind: LSU is one of the more conservative universities; but pictures of Noam Chomsky and Karl Marx are still included in the sociology department's "Hall of Fame." Anything that loosens this insidious stranglehold can only be for everyone's good—except, of course, for the Marxist profs and their propaganda.

Keavin Keith
Via e-mail

To the editor:

What a wonderful article. As a parent of three conservative and very cool kids, I wish the best of luck to David Horowitz et al. in their fight against the liberal indoctrination of our young.

J. Bell
Toledo, Ohio

Brian Anderson responds:

Mr. Greenhut's letter reads like a parody of today's Left—except it isn't. Clearly he's never read any of the conservative student papers that he claims represent a narrow "party line," since they're incredibly varied in tone and substance, representing traditionalist, libertarian, neo-conservative, and other rightish views—though perhaps not the "thousand and one different viewpoints" he detects on the Left (let's see: there's the victims of colonialism, and the victims of globalization, and the victims of homophobia, and the victims of racism, and the victims of sexism, and . . .). All student papers receive funding, moreover: sometimes from the schools, sometimes from off-campus groups, often both. I guess it's only a problem for Mr. Greenhut if right-of-center papers receive outside funding.

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The idea that professors lean left because they're smarter and better scholars is too absurd to respond to—though I'm sure it's what the Ward Churchills of academe believe, and what they would prefer that we all believe, as well.

In fact, Mr. Greenhut has it exactly backward: it's the Left that has long been sheltered from "variant argument," protected by a now-shattered media monopoly and the yet-to-be-broken domination of the nation's campuses.

My thanks to Mrs. Bell, Mr. Keith, and the many other letter writers who took the time to express their appreciation and interesting reflections.

Ludic Readers

To the editor:

The voices of working-class people that Jonathan Rose cites in "The Classics in the Slums" [Autumn 2004] are extremely touching. The profound experiences of which they speak are of no interest to most academics, I regret to say.

Years ago, I dropped into an academic conference of English professors at UC Santa Barbara, where I was finishing a Ph.D. in English. Katharine Stimpson (a future president of the Modern Languages Association) gave a talk in which she reported hearing rumors of a creature called the "ludic reader," who read works of "classic literature" for pleasure. She'd never met such people, and was not quite prepared to state positively that they existed. I raised my hand to say that I was such a reader. People who persist, as I have, in preferring what I can learn from Jane Austen or James Baldwin or Pushkin or Sophocles to whatever Frederic Jameson's latest emission is—well, we don't find a warm home in academia.

I gave up being an academic seven years ago. What made it worse for me as an academic was that, as a minority and a woman, I wasn't supposed to be excited about things like *Tristram Shandy* (which I still read once a year for pure pleasure and inspiration). All those people so concerned about diversity who got up at meetings to defend unreadable postcolonial novels were utter reactionaries when it came to the class dynamics of academia. If you were a minority, you were supposed to quietly beaver away at the works of Ngugi wa Thiong'o, not embrace the poetry of John Donne. Literary theory defended this position—a sort of sanctimonious, unacknowledged racism.

Kia Penso
Via e-mail

To the editor:

Jonathan Rose's article reminded me of my uncle, president of a furniture union local, who kept a trunk at the foot of his bed filled with Everyman Classics and E. Haldeman-Julius's "Little Blue Books"—ultra-cheap editions of the classics designed to fit into a workingman's pocket. My father, a bricklayer who never went past the sixth grade, could recite huge passages from Shakespeare, including *Lear* in its entirety. In a West Virginia mining camp, I encountered a black coal miner who lectured me about Diderot and Rousseau.

James H. Williams, Ph.D.
Savannah State University

To the editor:

"The Classics in the Slums" is both timely and moving.

Some additional information: the earliest lending library in Scotland was formed by Leadhills leadminers in the eighteenth century. The miners spent 12-hour days in darkness and went home to read the classics.

The Wordsworths visited the town and were astonished to hear the miners' children quoting Homer. The Leadhills Library is still in existence and is well worth a visit.

Angus Somerville
Via e-mail

Correction

To the editor:

Nicole Gelinas's "Corporate America's New Stealth Raiders" [Winter 2005] makes a common mistake: confusing the California School Employees Association (CSEA) and the California State Employees Association (also CSEA). Also, J. J. Jelincic is the current president of the State Employees Association.

Steve Mehlman
Communications Director
California State Employees Association

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letters to the editor.
e-mail: letters@city-journal.org
fax: 212-599-0371

Contributors

Theodore Dalrymple, a physician, is a contributing editor of *City Journal* and the Dietrich Weismann Fellow at the Manhattan Institute. His forthcoming book, *Our Culture, What's Left of It,* is the second collection of his *City Journal* essays.

Edward Feser is a writer and philosopher living in Los Angeles. He is the author of *On Nozick* and the forthcoming *Philosophy of Mind: A Short Introduction.*

Nicole Gelinas is a Chartered Financial Analyst, a business journalist, and a regular op-ed contributor to the *New York Post.*

Kay S. Hymowitz, a contributing editor of *City Journal* and the William E. Simon Fellow at the Manhattan Institute, is the author of *Liberation's Children* and *Ready or Not.*

Stefan Kanfer, a contributing editor of *City Journal* and a former editor of *Time,* is the author of several novels and social histories. The most recent of his many books is *Ball of Fire: The Tumultuous Life and Comic Art of Lucille Ball.*

Stanley Kurtz is a research fellow at the Hoover Institution and a contributing editor at *NationalReviewOnline.*

Heather Mac Donald is a contributing editor of *City Journal* and John M. Olin Fellow at the Manhattan Institute. She is the author of *Are Cops Racist?* and *The Burden of Bad Ideas.*

Myron Magnet is the editor of *City Journal* and the author of *The Dream and the Nightmare: The Sixties' Legacy to the Underclass* and *Dickens and the Social Order.*

Steven Malanga is a contributing editor of *City Journal* and a senior fellow at the Manhattan Institute. His forthcoming book, *The New New Left,* is a collection of his *City Journal* essays.

Harry Stein is a contributing editor of *City Journal.* A journalist and novelist, he is the author of *How I Accidentally Joined the Vast Right-Wing Conspiracy: (And Found Inner Peace)* and *The Girl Watchers Club.*

Detail of *7th Avenue Subway,* 1931
by James W. Kerr (1897–1994)

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Calcutta Diarist

High and Low

Theodore Dalrymple

Calcutta is the most literary city in India. The Bengalis have long prided themselves on being in the country's artistic and intellectual vanguard—which explains, perhaps, why West Bengal has a Marxist government and why Calcutta, until recently, has lagged at the rear of the economic transformation of India's cities. A disproportionate number of India's well-known writers in English hail from this terrible and wonderful place, where reality itself has a hallucinatory quality.

Calcutta's annual book fair must be among the world's largest. It takes place on the Maidan, the dusty central park, on which stands the Victoria Memorial, a monument that looks as if a mad confectioner had decided to build the world's largest structure out of sugar lumps. The crowds surging into the fair show an enthusiasm that in the West only a rock concert could kindle.

India is the world's third-largest publisher of English-language titles—about 50,000 a year—and is also home to several languages that have more native speakers than most European tongues do. It is not surprising, then, that the number of publishers is immense.

The standard of book production in India has risen enormously since the last time I attended the fair, seven years ago. This is one small consequence of the end of the Permit Raj, or Rule by Permit, under which bureaucrats parceled out economic activity to privileged companies: with what results for the quality of goods produced, and the honesty of all concerned, one can imagine. Indian books, however interesting or important, would come printed on paper of the worst quality, and appeared even when new as if they had long dwelled among the cockroaches; but now Indian books are fast approaching international standards. If the government does not reinstitute the Permit Raj, India could soon become printer to the world. Its mix of technological competence and cheap labor would be hard for other countries to beat.

The books range from abstruse scholarship to collections of jokes to model questions for the West Bengal Civil Service entry exam. The contrast between the latest textbooks on information technology on the one hand, and the guides to astrology palmistry and numerology on the other, is startling.

Why should it startle, though? In California, after all, the greatest technological sophistication coexists happily with the grossest superstition, and Isaac Newton himself valued his numerological and alchemical researches over his optical and astronomical ones.

Still, India's contrasts are starker than those almost anywhere else in the world. The exquisite taste in clothing of the Indian upper class is in sharp contradistinction to its complete indifference to the external appearance of houses and streets. The friend with whom I stayed is a doctor who spends part of his professional life in the highest of high-tech intensive-care units; but at home, his servants will not clean the bathroom because that is work for untouchables, one of whom he employs for this purpose alone.

To counter the effects of a social order that the Indian government officially considers unjust, policies reserve half the admissions slots at Indian universities for the "scheduled castes and tribes," whatever the exam results. This discrimination has had a powerful effect on my friend's life, because standards at Indian universities have fallen drastically as a result, and his children have thus longed to study abroad. He has devoted much of his adult life to earning enough for them to do so, no easy task in India.

Is untouchability a manifestation or consequence of the deep and pervasive spirituality of Indian life, or is it merely a religious smoke screen for illicit hereditary privilege? Or both?

As we were driving through Calcutta, my friend pointed to a little shrine to a god embedded in a wall just below waist level.

"Do you know why that idol is there?" he asked. I was about to say something pious about wayside shrines and the spiritual consolation of passersby, when he said, "It's to stop people from taking a leak there."

Was this a manifestation of spirituality, or materialism, or both? If you disrespect your gods, do you end up disrespecting your walls? Or do you make your walls your gods? I don't know.

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New York, New York, 10017
212-687-5154 Fax: 212-682-7599